1343. m.
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A

REINFORCEMENT

OF

REASONS proving the Stage

an *Unchriſtian Diverſion.*

1348. m

A

REINFORCEMENT

OF THE

REASONS

Proving that the STAGE is an UNCHRISTIAN DIVERSION.

OR,

A VINDICATION of the APPENDIX to the UUSE and ABUSE of DIVERSIONS, a Sermon on *Luke* xix. 13.

In Anſwer to

The REMARKS of an Anonymous Author.

———*Tota jube tolli theatra.* OVID.

Hoſtes plane ſumus, non generis humani tamen, ſed erroris. TERTUL. adv. Gentes.

By the Revd GEORGE ANDERSON V.D.M.
Author of the *Sermon* and *Appendix.*

EDINBURGH:

Printed by R. FLEMING, for J. M'EUEN, and ſold at his Shop; and at *London* by J. PEMBERTON, at the *Golden Buck*, over againſt St. *Dunſtan's Church* in *Fleetſtreet.* MDCCXXXIII.

REINFORCEMENT

OF THE

REASONS

Proving that the STAGE is an

UNCHRISTIAN DIVERSION,

&c. &c.

SIR,

EXCUSE the Omiſſion of any Epithet which may belong to you, ſuch as *Reverend*, &c. becauſe it is contrary to the Rules of Good-breeding, to take Notice of any Man who chooſes either to travel or to write *incognito*. It is a Piece of common Civility to return an Anſwer to a Letter, eſpecially when it requires one, whether it really deſerves it or not. And tho' yours to me, did not come directly to my Hands, perhaps thro' the Negligence of the Bearer, I think my ſelf obliged to anſwer it, in the ſame Manner in which you write, that is, by the Preſs.

I told you, in my *Sermon* (*a*), That I cannot have ſo low an Opinion of Mankind, as to perſuade my ſelf that any Man would allow himſelf to live in an habitual Breach of a Law of God, and in a conſtant Neglect of any Duty of his *holy Chriſtian Profeſſion*, and at the ſame Time, enjoy the Peace and Approbation of his own Mind, if he had not ſome private Principles of his own to ſupport him, and to enable him to look his Conſcience in the Face. Therefore, without the greateſt Injuſtice, and without contradicting my own Principles, I cannot but look upon you to be ſincerely of an Opinion different from mine, concerning the Sinfulneſs of *Stage-plays*. It would be very hard indeed, and exceedingly unfair, ſhould I refuſe you what I hope for from my *Superiors*.

It may not perhaps be amiſs, to inform you that ſome People are offended with me, for ſpeaking of the *Government* and *my ſelf* in the ſame Sentence, and for ſetting up my Opinion in the Matter of *Stage-plays* as ſuperior to the Wiſdom of the Nation.

(*a*) Page 7.

tion. A Sheet printed in this City, intitled, *Hints in Defence of dramatical Entertainment*, to me ſeem'd to call upon the civil Power, in Defence of the *Stage*, with fully as much Ill-breeding as Diſcretion, when he ſays, that to remonſtrate againſt it, is *Flying in the Face of the Government, an intolerable Rudeneſs, and a Hair-brained Stupidity.* The Man was elated, upon a Decree obtain'd in the *Seſſion* of our Senators of Juſtice, declaring *Revellings* and *Stage-plays lawful Diverſion.* And as I wrote, in the Face of that Decree, with ſuch a brisk Accuſer at my Hand, I thought it proper to make the beſt *Apology* that I could, to excuſe my ſelf at their Hands, who look upon the Sentence of a Judge, as an Act of the *Government.* But you, *Sir*, are ſo candid, as to think it no Crime in any Man to differ from another in his Opinion; or even, for a Subject to differ from his Sovereign. You juſtly give the ſame Freedom to others, which you take to your ſelf. And tho' I thought that I went far enough in making Allowances for the Miſtakes of Men, I find you go greater Lengths: But, upon ſecond Thoughts, I am perſuaded you exceed in your favourable Opinion of *Error.*

I did ſay (*b*), *If what I have ſaid have no Influence upon the Judgment of any one, the worſt that I ſhall think of my Readers, is, that they are* honeſtly, *tho'* culpably, *in an Error*. When I read theſe Words of yours, *I will not ſay that I look upon you as honeſtly tho' culpably in an Error*, I confeſs I made a Stop, thinking you ſuſpected my Sincerity; as if your Meaning had been, that you could not ſay that I was *honeſtly* in an Error. Some People have taken upon them to ſay, that I write againſt my own Judgment, becauſe ſo much Severity doth not agree with my Character and military Education. I pray God forgive them. But I was glad, both for your Sake and for my own, to find that you intended no more by the Expreſſion, than that a Man who was honeſtly miſtaken, was in no Fault at all.

HAD you remembered that I ſay (*c*), "It is impoſſible that Ignorance can always "excuſe, becauſe if there is any Duty in-"cumbent upon us, it is our Duty to know "it. All that is required of us as *Men* "and

(*b*) To the Reader. (*c*) Page 34.

" and *Chriſtians*, we are bound to under-
" ſtand. Our very Ignorance of our Duty
" is therefore criminal." I ſay, had you remembred and reflected upon this, I am apt to believe you had not found Fault with me for placing the Terms, *honeſtly* and *culpably* ſo near to one another. Suppoſe Fornication forbidden by the Gospel, (for that is a Matter of Diſpute with ſome) and that a Man, who hath all requiſite Helps to underſtand the Prohibition, ſhould notwithſtanding be of another Mind, in ſuch a Caſe, I think his Ignorance was blameable. I allow the Man is not conſcious of any wrong Method he hath taken in diſcovering the Mind of God, or of any Prejudice hindering him to find it out; but for all that he is not innocent. We have a natural Subtility in reaſoning favourably of our own Caſe, ſo extreamly fine, that it eſcapes our Obſervation. *The Heart of Man is deceitful above all Things*, for it deceives itſelf. Did we know our own Prejudices, they would ceaſe to be Prejudices any more. We would no more ſuffer our ſelves to be deceived and miſled by them, than one would allow himſelf to be blindfolded, when it was in his Power to remove

a move the Bondage, or to take a Chance inſtead of a Choice. I make no doubt but you will allow that the Apoſtle *Paul* was a ſincere, and conſequently, an honeſt Man, even before his Converſion: And yet he ſays of himſelf then (*d*) *who was a Blaſphemer, and a Perſecuter, and injurious.* But this Blaſphemer, this Perſecuter, this injurious Perſon doth not ſay *he was in no Fault at all.* On the contrary he adds, *neverthelefs I obtained Mercy, becauſe I did it ignorantly, in Unbelief.* Had he been in no Fault at all, he had needed no Mercy; For Mercy and Pardon always ſuppoſes a previous Crime. His *Ignorance* and *Unbelief* did not intirely exculpate him; but only rendered him a proper Object of the Compaſſion and Pardon of his GOD. According to your Poſition, thoſe that crucified the LORD of Glory, were in no Fault at all. And our LORD's Prayer (*e*), *Father forgive them, for they know not what they do,* was wrong worded. For he ſhould have rather ſaid, "Father remember that "nothing of all this is to be laid to their "Charge, for they know not what they "do."

YOUR

(*d*) 1 Tim. i. 13. (*e*) Luke xxiii. 34.

YOUR Poſition, Sir, is not only wrong in itſelf, but, in my Opinion, is extreamly dangerous, and hath led the Way into much *Infidelity* and *Atheiſm*. Some *Eſprits Forts* or bold Wits, having got into their Heads, that they are accountable only (if accountable at all) according to their own Notions and Principles, what ever they are at preſent, or may happen to be hereafter, all Opinions become equally innocent and ſafe to them, whether *Chriſtianity* or *Infidelity*, *Religion* or *Atheiſm*. The Innocence of all Errors, upon Suppoſition there is a GOD, to whom all Men are accountable, was a capital and favourite Opinion of the Author of *The Grounds and Reaſons of the Chriſtian Religion*, and of ſome other unworthy Performances; and which, in his Introduction to that Book, he endeavours ſtrenuouſly to ſupport. Upon a Conceit of his own Sincerity, to my certain Knowledge, he as little doubted of a good Reception into Heaven (if any ſuch Thing was) with all his Miſtakes and Errors about him, as the moſt orthodox Chriſtian in the World. The ſame Notion hath been embraced by the Author of *Chriſtianity as old as the Crea-*

Creation, and is well obſerved and refuted by Mr. *Foſter*, a Man, if I am not much miſtaken, of Principles ſufficiently Latitudinarian.

By your Scheme, likewiſe, the *Jeſuites* (*f*) have run mad in Defence of Ignorance. They maintain, *Firſt*, "That it ſeldom or never happens that a Man is "obliged to prepare himſelf by Grace to "get out of his Ignorance. Then they "hold there can be no Sin, where there "is no Knowledge of the *Deity*. And, "*Laſtly*, To crown all, they maintain that "not to know there is a God, muſt be "eſteemed a great Benefit and Favour. "For Sin being eſſentially an Affront to "the *Divine Being*, take away the Know-"ledge of God, and it neceſſarily follows "there is no Affront, no Sin committed, "and no eternal Puniſhment to be feared." I hope you will not imagine that I impute all theſe Conſequences to you. God forbid, I ſhould do you ſo much Injuſtice. I can eaſily believe that you did not foreſee them: For they have eſcaped the Obſervation

(*f*) A Parallel of the Doctrines of the Pagans, with the Doctrine of the Jeſuites.

vation of many, and in particular, the Right Reverend the preſent *Biſhop* of *Durham*, and the Reverend *Dr. Sykes*, in their Anſwers to *The Grounds and Reaſons*, &c. But, *Dear Sir*, examine your Poſition a little better, and I hope God will enable you to underſtand the Reaſon why the *holy Pſalmiſt* ſays, *Who can underſtand his Errors? Lord cleanſe thou me from ſecret Faults.* Pray to God to give you his Holy Spirit to lead you unto the Knowledge of all neceſſary Truths.

You are pleaſed, Sir, to approve of my poor Endeavours to ſerve my God and the Souls of Men, and to ſay, a few Things excepted, you could ſubſcribe my Sermon. Theſe Exceptions, I promiſe myſelf, cannot be material; for had they been of Importance, your Chriſtian Charity would have prevail'd with your Endeavours to have ſet me right. And is not a ſad Matter that the faſhionable Folks of this Place are as mad as ever upon their Diverſions? If it were not, that Miniſters of the Gospel are obliged to do their Duty and exonerate their own Conſciences, they might as well hold their Peace, as ſpeak againſt any

Vice that prevails with the politer Part of Mankind, and hath once got a Head of all Church Diſcipline. For theſe think themſelves above all miniſterial Admonitions, and others follow their Example. I have done my beſt to expoſe that deluſory Pretence that moſt People make for an idle Life, that is, that *they are innocent, and do no Hurt in their Generation*; and ſeeing I have done it to your Satisfaction, I hope whatever ~~this~~ others may do, you will, with the Aſſiſtance of Divine Grace, regard it in your future Converſation. Notions and Opinions ſignify nothing, but in ſo far as they affect and influence our Practice.

But, *Sir*, If *a Man who hath the Proſperity of his Country at Heart, can never be too copious and hardly too ſevere* upon the ſinful Waſte of Time and Subſtance occaſioned by Diverſions, excuſe me for ſaying that you have not acted the Part of a good Patriot or Politician, in making an unſeaſonable *Stand* to ſupport the Stage. Had I miſtaken the Meaning of the Scriptures, and miſtaken them *honeſtly*, and had others as honeſtly followed me in my Miſtake, according to your Principles, the Error could

could have hurt none of us, with Reſpect to another World; ſeeing he who is honeſtly in an Error, is in no Fault at all. And the preſent Practice which your *Remarks* tend to incourage, is of Conſequence to many as they are Men, Members of Society and as Chriſtians. Were this the proper Place, I could ſhew you that the greateſt Politicians have thought the Theatre hurtful to the Common-wealth, and the very Bane of Society. I could give you Authors of Repute and Credit, both ancient and modern, who have thought the Stage ruinous to Nations; and ſome particularly, who have aſcribed the Ruin of *Greece* and the Fall of the *Roman* Empire to it. But I know you'll ſay that this is nothing to you, who only contend for a well regulated Stage, ſuch as *Greeks* and *Romans* never had.

Before I enter upon an Examination of your *Remarks*, I find my ſelf obliged to give an Account of my very ſhort *Appendix*. My laſt Concluſion, ſuitable to the Title, is (g), "Seeing all Filthineſs, fooliſh "Talking and Jeſting is ſtill the Practice "of the Stage; and ſeeing all Interludes,

(g) Page 57.

"Tragedies, Comedies, Farces, are com-
"prehended in the Word *Revelling*, then
"are they forbidden as ſinful and unchri-
"ſtian." And I ſtill think that in the Management of the Argument, I have put nothing in this Concluſion which was not in the Premiſſes. I firſt of all affirm and prove, That tho' the Stage were in itſelf the moſt innocent and harmleſs Diverſion in the World, it may, for the Abuſe of it, become the Subject of a Divine Prohibition. Under which Head, I ſhew that the Stage hath been abuſed, and therefore diſcouraged by whole Nations; and that it continues to be abuſed to this Day. So the Caſe hath ſtood for the Space of Two thouſand three hundred Years. And from this I argue, That it would be no unreaſonable Hardſhip, nor ſavour too much of Severity, if God, foreſeeing the incorrigible Wickedneſs of the Stage, or, at leaſt, the hitherto uncorrected Abuſe of the Theatre, ſhould have forbidden it altogether in the Gospel; and, for Fear of being miſapprehended, I conclude that Head, and put it in *Italick*. *Such a Prohibition then is very poſſible*. And this Propoſition, I apprehend, is of Uſe in the Controverſy.

The

THE Patrons of the Stage, having found that the primitive Fathers of the Church, ſet themſelves ſtrongly againſt the Theatres of their Time, bethought themſelves how they might evade the Force of their Authority; ſome one Way, and ſome another. One pretends that they declaimed againſt it becauſe it was idolatrous; another, becauſe it was dangerous to new Converts, who lived among the Heathens, whoſe Religion they had forſaken. And a Third, becauſe thoſe Diverſions were unſuitable to the perſecuted State of the *Church* of CHRIST. For theſe and ſuch like Reaſons they highly commend the neceſſary Zeal of thoſe Fathers in running down the Stage-plays of the Heathens. And yet, at the ſame Time, ſome others of thoſe Protectors of the Theatre, triumph in the total Silence of the Apoſtles with regard to *dramatical Diverſions*, which they could not but obſerve while they travelled through the World in Execution of their Apoſtolical Commiſſion. Upon this Head Mr. *Congreve* firſt, and then our *City-hinter*, who copies him, have ſome ludicrous and invidious Things, which I thought fit not to mention. You are pleaſed to obſerve, that I turn the Argument againſt

gainſt the Author (and I think I do it juſtly) and, for that very Reaſon, maintain that the *Apoſtles* neither were, nor could be ſilent with regard to the Subject.

And becauſe Mr. *Filmer* hath mantained that that Paſſage *Eph.* v. doth not make againſt the Heathen Stage, or the Stage of Chriſtians (for I cannot as yet ſay the *Chriſtian Stage*) with a ſuitable Sanction; I thought it well worth my Pains to make the contrary appear, by putting the Paſſage in a better Light. And it is to be ſeen (*a*) that I conclude from it, that the *Apoſtle Paul* here declares *againſt the Stage-plays of the Heathens, and againſt all Stage-plays whatever, in which Filthineſs, fooliſh Talking or Jeſting is practiſed.*

And becauſe this is but a Conſequence, I then endeavour to ſhew that the Stage is expreſly forbidden under the Word *Revelling:* And if I have endeavoured to give an Account of its Signification, it was only to ſhew that it was the Opinion of our *Tranſlators*, that Stage-plays are forbidden by the *Apoſtles Peter* and *Paul.* And my Words are (*b*) " It is therefore certain that, in

(*a*) Page 54. (*b*) Page 44.

" in the Opinion of our *Tranſlators*, the " Stage is condemned as *Heathen* and *Un-* " *chriſtian*? And whether you or they have miſtaken the *Original*, ſhall be conſidered in its proper Place. And I conclude the whole with anſwering ſome Things commonly advanced in Favour of the Stage. Excuſe this long *Analyſis* of a very ſhort *Appendix*. I find that you have miſtaken the greater Part of my Argument, and I am afraid others may have done the like. I thought my Meaning in the whole was intelligible enough: But I ſee what appears plain to one's ſelf, may be obſcure to another. I had rather blame myſelf for Want of Perſpicuity, than entertain the leaſt Thought of your wilful Miſrepreſentations. Pardon me for this, if you expect to be excuſed for ſome Things in your own Performance, which might have got a clearer Turn, and been put in better Order.

But, *Sir*, I cannot forbear complaining of you for one Thing which runs through the whole *Remarks*. You imagine that every Thing I ſay, muſt *ſeparately* and *demonſtratively*, make out the laſt Concluſion, that *the Stage is ſinful and Unchriſtian*.

And

And this you expect from the Title of my *Appendix*. At this Rate, you would ſo cramp and fetter one, that he could not move a Step but in *Form* and *Figure*. For my part, I think it is very well, when what a Man ſays hath any Tendency to facilitate and inforce the Belief of what he propoſes to perſuade, and when the whole of the *Thing*, put together, bears upon the main and ultimate Point. Had I taken Occaſion to have given a ſhort Hiſtory of the Stage, and told you that it made its firſt Appearance at *Athens* in the Days of *Solon*, would you preſently come upon me with a formidable *Syllogiſm*? "What was practiſ-"ed at *Athens* in the Days of *Solon* muſt "be Unchriſtian, but the Stage was firſt "practiſed at *Athens* in the Days of *Solon*; "therefore it is Unchriſtian." And tho' this would be wide enough from the Purpoſe, I do think you are juſt as far from the Mark in many of your Obſervations. And the two *Syllogiſms* (*a*) which you make out of four Terms, and from which you make to yourſelf a triumphant Occaſion to deny the *Concluſions*, are put upon me with no Manner of Juſtice in the World, as I ſhall ſhew in the proper Place. I do not think

(*a*) Remarks, Page 15.

think that the Title of my *Appendix* will juſtify this hard Treatment; for, *Sweet Sir*, you and every Body knows that a Man cannot put every Thing in a Title-page. And now to come to Particulars,

I BEGIN with your *Remarks* upon the firſt Part of my *Appendix*, that is, That the Stage, with all poſſible Corrections and Amendments, may poſſibly become the Subject of a divine Prohibition. And here you are pleaſed to beſtow one of your theatrical Flouriſhes, when you ſay that I forbid all theatrical Repreſentations, *let them be never ſo noble and ſublime, never ſo warm Incentives to Virtue, never ſo powerful Preſervatives againſt Vice.* This is a very ſtrong Suppoſition indeed, which makes the Stage, improved to the utmoſt, equal, if not exceed the very preaching of the GOSPEL, as a Means of reforming the World. If any Man can really entertain ſuch an Opinion of a well regulated Stage, and think himſelf capable of promoting the ſublime and noble and moſt uſeful Deſign, it is my Opinion that he ſhould leave every other Buſineſs and *Calling* whatever, were it even the preaching of the GOSPEL (for that may be as

well done by others) to advance the glorious Work of dramatical Entertainment. For nothing can be of greater Benefit to Mankind than theſe unconceivably warm Incentives to Virtue, and ſuperlatively powerful Preſervatives againſt Vice. He wou'd deſerve a greater Reward than hath been yet promiſed for the Diſcovery of the *Longitude*. But that the Stage cannot admit of ſuch Improvement, I hope, will appear from what I have further to ſay on the Subject.

But allowing all this noble, ſublime, warm, and powerful Influence of the Stage upon the Morals of mortal Men, yet ſtill it may, for the Abuſe of it, poſſibly become the Subject of a divine Prohibition. And this I think you very near acknowledge (I cannot be poſitive) in your very next Paragraph, which, becauſe to me it appears ſomething intricate and perplexed, I take the Liberty to tranſcribe.

"At the ſame Time I admit, that Things "innocent in themſelves may become the "Subjects of divine Prohibitions; that is, "where the very *Uſe* does by a moral Ne-"ceſſity lead into Abuſes; but I have not ob-

" obſerved any one divine moral Precept,
" forbidding the Uſe of Things innocent,
" merely, becauſe of the Poſſibility of an
" Abuſe: In judging of ſuch Tendencies,
" the Scriptures ſhall always be my Rule:
" And if I there find poſitive Injunctions to ab-
" ſtain from any Practice, I lay my Hand upon
" my Mouth, reſting aſſur'd from the Decla-
" rations of divine Wiſdom, that the *innocent*
" *Uſe* of ſuch Things is *next to impoſſible.*

THO' I have conſidered this Paragraph with great Attention, I can make nothing of it to your Purpoſe. You admit, that Things, innocent in themſelves, may become the Subjects of divine Prohibitions; but with this Limitation, *if the very Uſe does by a moral Neceſſity lead into Abuſes.* In my Opinion, you hereby take back your ſeeming Conceſſion, and juſt admit nothing at all. For when the Uſe by a moral Neceſſity, leads into an Abuſe, that is, whilſt the Humours, Inclinations and Paſſions, and all the Frailties, Failings and Weakneſſes of Men, and the Courſe of Things, continue as they are and have been for many Ages paſt; then all ſuch Practices, as have a general and prevailing ill Influence upon our

Morals, ought to be entirely laid aſide and aboliſhed. And of ſuch Tendencies and Influences, our Reaſon and Obſervation, without the Aſſiſtance of an *expreſs* divine Revelation, is ſufficient to make the Diſcovery. Our Duty, in ſuch a Caſe, is taught us in the Lord's Prayer, *lead us not into Temptation*, and confirmed to us by a Command given to the *Iſraelites* (*a*), *to deſtroy the Altars of Idolaters, and break down their Images, and cut down their Groves*: And by the Practice of *Hezekiah*, who brake in Pieces the brazen Serpent, becauſe the People had burnt Incenſe unto it, and might do ſo afterwards. Sin and all unneceſſary Occaſions of ſinning, are to be taken away from among the People.

After diſtinguiſhing betwixt *moral* and *poſitive* Precepts, you ſay, that you have not obſerved any one *moral Precept*, forbidding the Uſe of Things innocent. And I do not ſee, how you could poſſibly find ſuch an Inſtance; for this to me appears a plain Contradiction. *Moral Precepts* are the Laws of Nature republiſhed to Mankind by *Divine Revelation*. Theſe are

(*a*) Deut. 7. 5.

are of an unchangeable Obligation, and have for their Subject, if a Command, ſomething good and virtuous in it ſelf; and, if a Prohibition, ſomething evil and vitious in its own Nature. But to forbid the Uſe of innocent Things, is not a *moral* but a *poſitive* Prohibition. And ſuch Precepts may be more or leſs in Number, as it ſhall ſeem good to God. In judging of ſuch Tendencies, you ſay, the Scriptures ſhall always be your Rule, that is in judging of the Influences of innocent Things, by a prevailing Abuſe, leading Men into Vice. And in judging of thoſe Influences and Tendencies, my Reaſon alone, when I cannot find Divine Revelation, ſhall be my Rule. Without an expreſs divine Precept in a particular Caſe, I ſhall think it my Duty to abſtain from any dangerous and inſnaring Practice, when I am under no Neceſſity of acting. And if I find any ſuch poſitive and direct Prohibition in the Word of God, I think it my Duty to forbear, whether to me it appears dangerous or not, and to perſwade others to forbear likewiſe. But I cannot thence conclude with you, in the caſe of a poſitive divine Precept, that the *innocent Uſe* of ſuch Things, is *next to impoſſible*.

For

For when the beſt that we can ſay of them is, that they are innocent in themſelves, they may be prohibited by Divine Authority, tho' not dangerous to the laſt Degree, or ſo dangerous as to render the ſafe Uſe of them *next to impoſſible*. But, I am afraid, I have beſtowed more Pains upon this Paragraph of yours than it is all worth. For to tell you my Mind (pray keep your Temper) I believe it would ſurpaſs the Skill of e that eminent Hypørcritick Dr. *Bently* to make it both Senſe and Reaſon. However I have one Remark more to make upon it. "Things innocent in themſelves may be- "come the Subjects of divine Prohibitions, "when the very Uſe does, by a moral "Neceſſity, lead unto Abuſes." So ſay you. But it is my Opinion that then the very Uſe of ſuch Things becomes unlawful, whether they are expreſly forbidden in the Word of God, or not. I ſay *expreſly*, for by a very juſt Conſequence they actually ſtand prohibited upon ſacred Record. And for this I affirm that the Stage ought to be totally abdicated; for nothing hath done leſs Good and more Harm in the World. Allow me, on this Occaſion to borrow one of Mr. *Prynne*'s Syllogiſms.

(*a*) That

(*a*) THAT which ordinarily corrupts the Minds and vitiates the Manners both of Actors and Spectators, muſt doubtleſs be unlawful, yea abomina ble unto Chriſtians, and intolerable in any well ordered Common-wealth.

BUT Stage-plays ordinarily corrupt the Minds and vitiate the Manners both of Actors and Spectators.

THEREFORE, they muſt doubtleſs be unlawful, yea abominable unto Chriſtians and intolerable in any well ordered Common-wealth.

I believe you allow that Stage-plays have been ſuch, in general, as corrupt the Minds and vitiate the Manners of Men. And you admit that immoral and lewd Compoſitions, Impurities, Obſcenities, Vice and unprofitable ſpeaking are loudly exclaimed againſt in the *holy Scriptures*. You likewiſe agree with me, that were *natural Morality* or good Reaſon to be the Rule, few of our modern Plays could ſtand the Teſt; and you heartily wiſh for an *index expurgatorius* (an *index ſelectus* would be much ſhorter): And

(*a*) Hiſtrio-maſtix.

And therefore, Sir, you are much miſtaken, when you put *Plays* and *Sermons* upon the ſame Footing; and had you pleaſed to have omitted the Compariſon, you had done better. Compariſons, we ſay, are *odius*, and yours hath given much Offence. And, *Tho' it may be ſaid with Juſtice, That at ſome Time or other, Doctrines have been inforced from the Pulpit more dangerous, more deſtructive to Honeſty, to good Morals and to Society, than the moſt abandon'd Play-writer ever durſt bring upon the Stage*, yet, I hope, this hath not frequently happened; you cannot ſay, that *Sermons ordinarily corrupt the Minds and vitiate the Manners of Preachers and Hearers.* I talk upon the Footing of Chriſtianity, and I am under no Neceſſity to vindicate that Divine Ordinance. Idolatry and Perſecution have been and ſtill are preached up in ſome Places; but Idolatry, Atheiſm and all Manner of Impieties and Impurities have been preſented to the World from the Stage. But to cut this ſhort, I ſay, if the Pulpit, from firſt to laſt, had done as little Good and as much Hurt to Mankind, as the Stage hath done, to me it would become a Matter highly worth Conſideration,

tion, whether even divine Appointment, together with the Hopes of future Amendment, could protect the Practice of preaching any longer. I ſhould be apt to look upon the univerſal bad Conſequences of it, which by a moral Neceſſity, led into Abuſes, as a tacite Diſpenſation of the Command, *preach the Word.* But as a Divine Inſtitution can never be attended with ſuch deplorable Effects and Conſequences, this is but a mere *hypothetical* Argument. And I verily believe that theſe who now plead for Mercy to the profane Stage, and for Patience with bad Plays until better can be got, would be the firſt to lay their Hands upon the Pulpits, provided there was no Diverſion in them, and would be very forward to have a Law enacted, declaring all Preachers *Vagabonds* and *ſturdy Beggars.* And, SIR, you are one of theſe that plead for a well reformed and regulated Stage. Your Pleadings ſhall be conſidered, but I muſt firſt vindicate my own Poſitions from your injurious Remarks.

I cannot ſay that it is my Fault you have miſtaken the Story of the *Lacedemonian*, who ſaid, That, in Tragedy, the *Athenians*

played the Fool in good earneſt. For his Obſervation was not made merely upon the Matter and Manner of theſe Plays, but upon the Charges they coſt the State. For, *Plutarch*, in the Place quoted (*a*), ſays, they coſt them as much as would have maintain'd a good Fleet at Sea, and a conſiderable Army by Land. And, I fancy, in ſuch a Caſe, had you known it, you your ſelf would have taken ſide with me, as I did with the wiſe *Spartan*. For, their putting ſuch a high Value upon Tragedy muſt be fooliſh in the Eyes of all wiſe Men. For this they are blamed and ridiculed by the Hiſtorian *Juſtin* (*b*). I likewiſe take the Freedom to ſet you right as to the Influence of tragical Repreſentations upon the Minds and Morals of the *Athenians*. For, let me aſſure you, that that the *juſt Dignity and chaſte Morality* which you ſpeak of (a Phraſe borrowed from ſome Play-poet) was never owing to their Tragick-poets, whoſe *Remains* ſcarce contain ſo much as one good Moral in them. This is not mine, but a Cenſure paſt upon them by an eminent Patron of the modern Stage

(*a*) De gloria Athenienſium. (*b*) Lib. vi.

Stage (*c*). He ſays, 1. "The Ancients notoriouſly intereſt Providence in promoting Villany in many of their Plays, of which Number are the *Electra* of *Sophocles*, the *Electra*, *Oreſtes*, *Hyppolitus*, *Ion* and others of *Euripides*, and the *Thyeſtes* of *Seneca*. 2. They manifeſtly make the gods the immediate Actors in, or Directors of the Misfortunes of virtuous Perſons; as in the *Prometheus in Chains* of *Æſchylus*, the *OEdipus* of *Sophocles*; the *Hyppolitus* and *Hercules furens* of *Euripides*, and the *OEdipus* and *Hercules furens* of *Seneca*, and divers others of Antiquity. 3. The Ancients provide Malefactors with a miraculous Delivery, or have Recourſe to ſuch extraordinary Methods, as exceed the Reach of human Force or Cunning, ſo as to intitle Providence to the Protection of them, which was their frequent Practice; as in the *Electra* of *Sophocles*, the *Medea*, the *Oreſtes*, the *Electra* and others of *Euripides*, the *Medea* of *Seneca*, &c." If you ſhould differ in your Opinion from this learned Gentleman there's nothing in it.

(*c*) Author of the ancient and modern Stage ſurveyed, Page 218.

It is common for the Champions of the Theatre, like ill diſciplined Troops, to fall foul of one another in Time of Action. The Inſtance which you are pleaſed to give of the *Juſt Dignity and chaſte Morality* of the *Athenians* kept up by their Tragick-Poets, is juſt againſt you. For had they known no more of the Matter than what they learned from the Stage, they would not have taken Offence at *Euripides*. The Man intended to teach them *Religion* as well as Morality, or rather to unteach them ſome eſtabliſhed Notions about *Jupiter* (*d*). He began his Play, *O Jupiter of whom we know nothing but the Name*, and they who worſhipped this *Jupiter* as their chief Deity, without conſidering whether it was in Character or out of it, hiſſed him for his Pains. Upon which he changed his Language and ſaid, *O Jupiter whoſe Name agrees with thy Divinity*. They had learned ſo much of their Religion from other Hands, that they would not ſuffer the Poet to diſcredit it, tho' but in Jeſt. You

(*d*) Plutarch. de amore.

You ſay, " That to be able to draw a " concluſive Argument from the Law made " againſt an *Areopagite*'s Writing a Come- " dy, one ſhould know at what Time it " was made, whether before or after *Me-* " *nander*?" Had you known, *Sir*, that before *Menander* appeared, the *Athenians* had abdicated both Comedy and Tragedy, you would not have asked the Queſtion. A Succeſſion, it is true, of Comick and Tragick Poets continued until the Times of *Auguſtus Cæſar*. Their Verſes and Compoſitions were read and recited. But ſome Poets of Repute reckoned it a Diſhonour to have their Works paſs thro' the Hands of Hackney-Actors (*a*). *Bacchinals* were ſtill kept up at *Athens*, but purely upon a religious Account. I here again put you in Mind that I draw no concluſive Argument againſt the Stage as it is an Unchriſtian Diverſion, from the *Athenian* Law diſcharging an *Areopagite* to write a Comedy. I only mention'd it, to ſhew that the firſt and great Encouragers of the Stage, had no great Opinion of that Part of Dramatical Entertainment.

And

(*a*) ————An tua demens
Vilibus in ludis dictari carmina malis. Hor. Serm. Lib. 1.

And all the Argument that is in it, only affects a preliminary Concluſion, *That a total Prohibition of the Stage, is very poſſible under the GOSPEL.* Don't think that I take Notice of any of your hiſtorical Miſtakes, with a Deſign to leſſen you in your own Eſteem. I ſay, *in your own Eſteem*; for an anonimous Author always ſecures his own Reputation, whatever becomes of his Performance. And, for my Part, notwithſtanding you ſeem pretty much a Stranger to the Subject you write upon, I do think you may be very well qualified either for the Pulpit or the Bar.

The Patrons of the Stage having triumphed in a pretended Silence of the Apoſtles, with regard to thoſe Theatres that met them at every Turn, I thought it proper to oppoſe the Miſtake, not only to vindicate them from the Aſperſion of unfaithful Miniſters, which Infidels might, therefore, caſt upon them, but likewiſe to ſhew that Stage-plays ſtand condemned upon ſacred Record. I acknowledge the great Point in my View was to ſhew, that ſuch a Tragedy as *Cato*, and ſuch a Comedy as *the Funeral*, and that even better than either,

fell

fell under the divine Prohibition; but, with your Leave, it was not irregular in me to take Notice of what had been ſaid upon a total Silence of the *Scriptures*, as to Stage-plays, and even to make Uſe of it, in order to remove any Prejudices againſt the Meaning of ſuch Paſſages as point againſt them. And tho' in that I do not touch the main Point *demonſtratively*, yet I do not altogether loſe Sight of it. And I can ſee no Reaſon why you find Fault with me, *for chuſing the idleſt Things which the Patrons of the Stage have dropt as the main Grounds on which they rely*. Pleaſe conſider again, that, in the Particular of *Scripture Silence*, I had no Choice to make. They alledge it without the leaſt Inſinuation that the Heathen Stage was ever directly or indirectly taken Notice of by the Apoſtles; and you yourſelf think their *Argument unanſwerable* (*a*). And for as trifling as this may appear to ſome, yet it hath been conſidered by others (*b*), tho' anſwered in

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(*a*) Page 13. (*b*) There are ſome Chriſtians, who, out of Simplicity or Want of Docility, can hardly believe that they are obliged to deprive themſelves of the Diverſion of the publick Shews; becauſe, they ſay, it doth not appear in the holy Scriptures, that this is forbidden to the Servants of God.

It

a different Way. But let theſe Things, upon which the Patrons of the Stage rely, be ever ſo idle, yet ſince they rely upon them as their main Grounds, they were not to be neglected. And, to let you into a Secret, I think never any Thing hath been ſaid or dropt in Defence of Stage-plays, but what is exceedingly idle. Wherever the Strength lies, I ſee nothing but great Weakneſs. But theſe weak Things being thought ſtrong by weak People, they that would oppoſe the Stage, are obliged to conſider them. And it is for this very Reaſon that I take notice of your *Remarks*.

You Sir, are ſo candid as to allow, that the Apoſtles did condemn the Stage Plays of their Day, for ſome Reaſon or other, as the Fathers condemned thoſe of their Times. But I do not agree with you, when you ſay, "That the Fathers had gone be-
"yond their Commiſſion, had they for-
"bidden

It is true we do not find this Prohibition in expreſs Terms in holy Scripture, You ſhall not go to the *Circus*, you ſhall not be preſent at Plays, you ſhall not be Spectators of the Combats of the Wreſtlers, or of the Gladiators, as it is ſaid in formal Terms, *Thou ſhalt not kill, &c.* but the Condemnation of Shews, is notwithſtanding clearly expreſſed by the firſt Words of the Pſalms of *David*. *Tert. de Spect.*

" bidden the Attendance of Chriſtians at " innocent Entertainments." For in many Caſes, Things innocent in themſelves, are to be abſtained from. The danger of *exceeding* in the Uſe of them, and the fear of offending a weak Brother, are ſufficient Reaſons to forbear, eſpecially when what we do refrain from, is at beſt but a Diverſion.

I AM not much concerned with your Definitions of *Tragedy* and *Comedy*; but I can never allow that *Tragedy is a ſerious Lecture upon our Duty*. This is a comical Deſcription of a Tragedy. I always took a Tragedy to be a *Play* and a *Diverſion*; and you almoſt make me laugh, when you call a *Play* a *ſerious Lecture*. Sure every Thing in your favourite *Cato*, is not *ſerious*. When I am ſerious, I am always in Earneſt. And the Author of *Cato* was a better Man and a better Chriſtian, than to have ſeriouſly invoked the Gods, and ſworn *by the Heavens*, in good earneſt, or to have put theſe Words in his Hero's Mouth (*a*).

Juba, *Thy Father, was a worthy Prince,*
And merited, alas! a better Fate,
But Heaven thought otherwiſe.

(*a*) Act II. Scen. 4.

And if Comedy manages us as Children, it is a childiſh Thing to be managed by it. And tho' Tragedy may affect our Paſſions, and work upon our weaker Part; ſtill it is rather a *luſory* than a *manly* Way of convincing.

To do you Honour, I muſt neglect nothing that you ſay; for you ſay it, that it may be noticed. And I am even obliged to differ from you in a very ſmall Matter. For I cannot allow that the Play-houſe is a proper School in which to learn Elegance of Taſte in Pronounciation and Geſture. For the Language and Stile of the Stage, and Action and Geſture of the Actors, are entirely unfit for private Converſation, the Pulpit, the Bar, and the Senate; and an Imitation of all Theatrical Ways, always ſhews the Fop, but never the Gentleman.

It is certain, that all Things wicked and immoral are forbidden in the GOSPEL, whether practiſed on the Stage or in private. And in that general Prohibition, the Immoralities of the Stage, and all immoral Plays are condemned. But I hope to ſatisfy you fur-

further, that Plays are particularly pointed at; and that no *Drama*, according to the Maxims of the *Chriſtian Religion*, is a lawful Diverſion. And if this is true, your ſimilar Argument is wide from the Purpoſe. The Tongue may be abuſed, and too oft is made an Inſtrument of the worſt of Crimes. But it cannot be ſaid that the Apoſtle in forbidding theſe Crimes hath denied us the Uſe of Speech. Sir, had we as little Occaſion for the Tongue as we have for Tragedy and Comedy, and did this Tongue no more good, and as much hurt as thoſe Diverſions do, we ought literally to cut it out as an offenſive and hurtful Member. We are indued with Speech to communicate our Thoughts to one another, and to praiſe and bleſs our God. It is neceſſary for the Perfection of our Nature, and for rendering it comfortable. In a Word, we want it for the nobleſt Purpoſes, which no other Means can anſwer. And therefore the Abuſes which ariſe from it, by the Miſmanagement of Men, can never juſtify a total Silence. If ſo much can be ſaid for Stage-plays, then ſhall I admit, that no Abuſes whatever can juſtify a total Suppreſſion of them, and that

they neither are, nor can be condemned in the *Holy Scriptures*.

SIR, You can be angry when you pleaſe. You are in a great Paſſion with my Author Mr. *Filmer*, whom you call "an infamous "Court-Sycophant, an Enemy to the Race "of Mankind, one who was willing to ſe-"cure Impunity to the moſt monſtruous A-"buſes of the Stage, one who is loath to "part with a ſingle vitious or idle Expreſ-"ſion, one, to whoſe Purpoſe every Thing "ſerved which could enervate our Minds, "and bring us to reliſh, or wiſh for that "Slavery which he allots for us." I am glad you are of Opinion that the Abuſe of the Stage tends to enervate the Minds of the People, and to prepare them for Slavery. I'll endeavour to remember it. But I do not ſee any Reaſon why you ought to be ſo angry with Mr. *Filmer*. The Gentleman, whoſe Book I have peruſed, was a *Doctor* of the *Civil Law*, and wrote *Anno* 1707, in the glorious Days of *Queen Anne*. There was another of the Name of *Filmer*, Sir *Robert*, who in the Days of *King Charles the Second* wrote in Support of *hereditary Right* and *paſſive Obedience*. I apprehend you

you have miſtaken the one for the other; and, what confirms me in this Opinion, is, you are juſt as much miſtaken in the Account you give of the *Performance*, when you ſay, That he is willing to ſecure Impunity to the moſt monſtruous Abuſes of the Stage, and that he will not part with one ſingle vitious or idle Expreſſion in our Plays. Now, *Sir*, the Gentleman hath the Reformation of the Stage as much at Heart as your ſelf, and perhaps more. And becauſe you'll be pleaſed to ſee Juſtice done him, and likewiſe to have him on your Side of the Queſtion, both for your Sake and his too, I take the Freedom to tranſcribe ſome Paſſages in his Book. He ſays (*a*), "Our comick "Poets often wrong the beſt and nobleſt "Characters, whilſt they very frequently "make their Women of Quality and Virtue, talk downright baudy; and their fine "accompliſhed Gentlemen, their Hero's, profane in their Courtſhip, leud and irreligious in their Converſation, in a Word, "monſtrous Libertines: And after all, ſo far "are they from puniſhing them, that for "the moſt Part, thoſe very Gentlemen are "repreſented as ſucceſsful in all their Attempts. No Wonder then that ſome of "our

(*a*) Page 41.

" our modern Comedies have afforded Mr. " *Collier* ſuch a plentiful Crop of Weeds " as he hath expoſed to the World.

HAVING, as he ſuppoſes, juſtified ſeveral vitious Expreſſions, becauſe ſpoken in *Character*, he hath theſe Words, " But " how then? Muſt all vitious *Characters* " be indifferently admitted in the Stage? " And under that Pretence ſhall our Poets " dare wanton with Sin, and at their Plea- " ſure vent their own filthy, nauſeous Ex- " preſſions? Shall the Comedian in the Per- " ſon of a Pimp, a Whore or a Bawd, fly " out into all the groſſeſt Extravagancies of " Smut, and ranſack the very Stews for " Language to adorn their Characters? Or " ſhall the Tragick-poet, under Shelter of " an irreligious or atheiſtical Perſon, fly " preſently in the Face of Heaven, defy his " Maker, profane his holy Name, and blaſ- " pheme at any Rate? By no Means.

BUT with Pleaſure I tranſcribe the following Words, "But, above all, he muſt " not pretend to meddle with any Thing " that is either ſacred in itſelf, or by Cu- " ſtom appropriated to ſacred Uſes. No

" Stor

" Story, no Phraſe, no Expreſſion whatever
" in the *Bible* may be repeated, or ſo much
" as alluded to without Sin. The *Holy*
" *Bible* is ſacred in every minuteſt Part of
" it. It is that glorious Charter by which
" alone we can ever hope to be inveſted in
" all the Privileges of the *new Jeruſalem*;
" the ſacred Record of our great GOD's
" gracious Promiſes to Mankind; that bleſ-
" ſed Fountain of pure living Water, whence
" we draw all our ſweeteſt Hopes of ever-
" laſting Life and Happineſs. And ſhall a
" Poet then dare to ridicule the *Bible*, or
" any the leaſt Part of it? No certainly.
" The diſmal Conſequences of ſuch Impi-
" ety are too terrible and too certain.
" There's no trifling, no jeſting with a Text
" of *Scripture*, but what will infallibly end
" in ſad and woful Earneſt. No ſuch hor-
" rid and prepoſterous Mirth, but what
" muſt terminate, without GOD's inter-
" veening Mercy on Repentance, in weep-
" ing, wailing, gnaſhing of Teeth.

SIR, I would have you and Mr. *Filmer* made acquainted. The Gentleman is not near ſo bad as you have repreſented him; and I hope you will beg his Pardon for the In-

Injury you have done him. I am ſure I did not lead you into the Miſtake; I rather took Pains to prevent it. I quoted fairly to a ~~Paſſage~~ page, tho' you do not quote with hiu a Volume. And had you believed me, whe" I told you in Mr. *Filmer*'s Name, that *no Vice ought to be brought upon a Stage, but what the Audience may ſafely laugh at*, you would have found that he hath carried the *Reformation* of the Stage beyond your own Standard. Take this Advice from me, as from a Friend, never to give a Character of a Book before you have ſeen it.

I now follow you to the grand Point, the Meaning of theſe Texts of *Scripture* brought by me, in ſupport of my Opinion. And here give me Leave to put you in mind, that the *Reaſonings* of ſome Defenders of the Stage, forced me to join Iſſue with them in theſe Words, *The Apoſtles either deſerve not the Name of Chriſtians, or they did diſſuade the World from the Stage as ſincerely as they could.* Perhaps, had I not found ſuch Pleadings from a pretended ſcriptural Silence, in my Way, I might have taken another Method. I own I am not much in Love with this Way of Reaſoning

ing about Matters of Revelation. *Such a Command, or ſuch a Prohibition ought to be in the Bible, and therefore it is in the Bible.* But in the Caſe before me, I was not left to my Liberty. Having premiſed a few Things to diſpoſe the Patrons and Admirers of the Stage, to ſearch the Scriptures, without Prejudice or Prepoſſeſſion, for ſuch a Prohibition, as a Point upon which the apoſtolical Character depends, I then fixed upon ſome of the firſt *Verſes* of the fifth *Chapter* of the Apoſtle *Paul*'s Epiſtle to the *Epheſians*. In my Explication of that Paſſage, it is to be ſeen, that my View is to make appear that the *Apoſtle* doth there condemn the Stage of his own Time. And my Concluſion is (*a*) That the Apoſtle hath declared againſt the Stage of his own Time. And becauſe it is not there condemned as idolatrous, I drew this *Corollary*. "The Apoſtle hath likewiſe declared a-"gainſt all Stage-plays whatever, where "*Filthineſs, fooliſh Talking, or Jeſting* is "practiſed." I admit, at the ſame Time, that this is not an *expreſs* but a *conſequential* Condemnation of the Stage ſo circumſtanced, and juſtify the Argument, from

 the

(*a*) Page 54.

the Inſtance of Stews being forbidden by the ſame Laws which forbid *Uncleanneſs*. And whether I had any Right to affirm, that *the Stage is prohibited by the ſame Law which forbids the Buffoonries of it*, ſhall be conſidered, by and by. In order to this I accepted the Benefit of Mr. *Filmer*'s Conceſſion, that the Apoſtle's Words *ſweep both Comedy and Tragedy*, and then I took ſome Pains to ſet them in a better Light than he had done. And, if this is more, in your Opinion, than the Author and his Commentary deſerve, I do not think that I have leſſened myſelf in doing it. It is for great Men, and not for ſuch as I am, to deſpiſe any Thing that an ingenious Gentleman hath thought fit to impart to the Publick. I am apt to think that every one that attends Plays, is not fully ſatisfied in his own Mind, as to the Lawfulneſs and Chriſtianity of the Diverſion. And tho' *Proteſtants* have *ſpeculatively* rejected the Diſtinction of *venial* and *damnable* Sins, yet ſome of them are often *practically* in the ſame Miſtake, in expecting God's Pardon, of Courſe, for ſmal Sins which they, in Courſe, commit.

And

And upon this Head, I take the Freedom to obſerve (but don't think, as you uſe to do, that I make Uſe of the Obſervation as a concluſive Argument) I ſay, I obſerve that the Papiſts, who admit the Diſtinction of *Venial* and *Damnable*, do not uſually higle ſo hard againſt a Goſpel Command, or Prohibition, and are more ready to admit ſome Actions to be Sins, than the Proteſtants who want their *Salvo*. For Inſtance, our Lord and Saviour hath ſaid (*b*). *But I ſay unto you, that every idle Word that Men ſhall ſpeak, they ſhall give an Account thereof at the Day of Judgment.* Moſt Popiſh Interpreters, by *idle Words*, underſtand uſeleſs and unprofitable Words, and theſe they reckon ſo many *venial* Sins; But I could ſhew you that ſome Proteſtants, for fear theſe many uſeleſs Words might dreadfully inflame their Account at the *great Day*, having Recourſe to the Occaſion upon which they were ſpoken, chooſe rather to underſtand it as an Appendix to the great Sin againſt the Holy Ghost, and that without the leaſt Regard to the Epithet, *Idle*. And I

 have

(*b*) Mat. xii. 36.

have a ſtrong Suſpicion, that could I prove that Comedies and Tragedies were but *Syſtems* of idle and unprofitable Words, they who admire theſe ſublime Diverſions, would rather chooſe to make *idle Words* ſignifie the Sin againſt the Holy Ghost, than allow that our Lord condemns their darling Stage-plays. I don't ſay, *Sir*, that you would; for I think you have not left yourſelf that Evaſion, by acknowledging that idle and unprofitable Words are ſinful, and *loudly exclaimed againſt in the Holy Scriptures.*

But, to return to your *Remarks.* You ſuppoſe that I was to prove ſomething, *viz.* that there were ſome Texts of Scripture, declaring either expreſſly or implicitly againſt the Stage. Very true. And I have given Inſtances of both Sorts. Here you ſurprize me with laying a Blunder to my Door, when you ſay, "That, inſtead of that "I lay upon my Adverſary the Burden of "proving the contrary of my Propoſition, "and thereby invert my own Caſe, which "is that of one affirming, and not barely "denying, but indeed the Obſervation doth "not hold." *But indeed the Obſervation doth*

doth not hold. Well ſaid. You muſt mean this your own judicious and candid *Obſervation* upon my Way of Reaſoning (for I know of no Obſervation I had made, or of any other that you refer to), and that it doth not hold is indeed a juſt Acknowledgment, and more than I expected from you.

To make *Filthineſs, fooliſh talking or jeſting, ſweep both Comedies and Tragedies,* my Author ſays, is to put the *Apoſtle's* Meaning to a higher Pitch than ever he intended. And here, I ask the Queſtion, *Which Way can any Man know that the Apoſtle's Meaning was not ſo high as to reach the Comedies and Tragedies of his own Time?* 'Tis a hard Caſe indeed, that I cannot expreſs my Meaning by Way of Queſtion, without an Accuſation of changing Sides immediately, and putting the Burden of Probation from off myſelf upon my Adverſary. I firſt join with him, in allowing the *Apoſtle's* Words to demoliſh the Theatres of the Heathens, for being incumbered with *Filthineſs, fooliſh Talking and Jeſting.* To take off the Force of this, my Adverſary ſays, the Apoſtle's Meaning was not ſo high. And I reply, this is more than

than he, or any Man can know; and this is preciſely the Meaning of my Queſtion. I alledge the Words of *Scripture* in their obvious Meaning; and if he was to reſtrain their Senſe to ſave the Theatres, he was obliged to give a Reaſon for it. He thought ſo himſelf, and attempts it boldly. I follow him his full Length, and, to your Satisfaction, and even to raiſe your Indignation againſt him, diſprove his Commentary. And then after all, I give what I ſtill think, the true and genuine Meaning of the Paſſage. And let me ask you, is this changing Sides, and ſhifting the Proof I undertook? My good Friend, you ſee if I have put the Proof of a *Negative* upon the Defendant, he is not ſenſible of it himſelf; and I have very ſoon eaſed his Shoulders of the Load.

I APPREHEND, *Sir*, you do me more Injuſtice than I have done him, by ſaying, that "any Man may know that "the *Apoſtle*'s Meaning was ſo high, *and* "*no higher*, than to reach ſuch Plays as "are filthy." By your Leave, you are in a groſs Miſtake. The *Apoſtle*'s Meaning reaches higher than juſt *filthy Plays*. It reach-

reaches all Plays beſides, that have *fooliſh Talking or Jeſting* in them. And tho' I do not, others may think that you have wilfully miſrepreſented the *Apoſtle*'s Words: For in both your *Syllogiſms*, you put an *&c.* The Firſt of which is, "Uncleanneſs, "*&c.* is unlawful; but ſome Stage-plays "are unclean, therefore all Stage-plays are "unclean." The ſecond is, "All Stage-"plays were unclean in St. *Paul*'s Days, "but Uncleanneſs, *&c.* is forbidden, there-"fore all Stage-plays, clean and unclean "are forbidden to the End of the World." In place of both which, to do the Apoſtle's Words and my own Argument Juſtice, I take upon me to form another, tho' it is long ſince I dealt in that Method of Reaſoning. "All Stage-plays are forbidden that "have Filthineſs, fooliſh Talking or Jeſting "in them; but ſuch were the Stage-plays "of the apoſtolical Times, therefore the "Stage-plays of thoſe Times are forbid-"den." I think I need ſcarcely repeat that juſt ſo I conclude from the whole Paſſage. I have no Uſe for your *Syllogiſms*; they are form'd upon your own Miſtake, and not very fairly either; and you may diſpoſe of them which Way you pleaſe.

To

To determine what it is the *Apoſtle* here forbids, I did ſay, and ſtand to it, that the original Word, tranſlated *Jeſting*, ſignifies the *Buffoonry* of the Theatre. And I likewiſe admit, that "you never heard "it was taken in any ſuch Senſe either for "theatrical Buffoonry, or any other Buf-"foonry whatever." Then, *Sir*, I have told you News; for every Thing is new to one that he never heard before. *Buffoone* is a *French* Word, and ſignifies a Jeſter, and more ſtrictly a Man that abounds in Jeſts, or makes a Livelihood of his ridiculous Talent, in diverting Perſons that entertain him for his Pains. *Auguſtus Cæſar* had one of them called *Battus*. Perhaps his Name is taken from his Employment; for *Battos* was a fooliſh prattling *Grecian* Poet. From the Days of *Auguſtus* to near our own, it hath been cuſtomary for great Men to keep ſuch Buffoons, as their Servants and Attendants, as others now keep their Fidlers and Pipers. And ſuch a Pleaſant in our old *Scots* Language, was called a *Gilligapus*. Such as were moſt addicted to the Diverſion, and could beſt afford the Expence, kept ſe-

ſeveral of them to jeſt upon one another and the Company. I remember, Dr. *Welwood* in his *Memoirs*, ſays, " That King " *Charles* the Firſt's Jeſter, by Order of the " Privy Council, was ſtript of his Fool's " Coat, for ſpeaking diſreſpectfully of Arch- " biſhop *Laud*. It ſeems, being a Fool, he ſpoke out of Character, when he did it (*a*). I appeal to Monſieur *Martin*, Miniſter of the *French* Church at *Utrecht* as my Judge, Whether Buffoonry and Jeſting are not the ſame Thing. If there is any Difference at all, it only lies in this, that *Jeſting* may have a more extenſive Signification than *Buffoonry*, that is, all Buffoonry is Jeſting; but all Jeſting is not Buffoonry. And, to tell you more, he juſt explains the Original Word as I do (*b*). I not only give him credit for his *French*, but likewiſe re-

 ſpect

(*a*) *Plutarch* tells us, when the *Romans* ſent to *Tuſcany* for a Set of Players, the principal Actor among them was called *Hiſter* or *Iſter*; from which the *Latin* Word *Hiſtrio*, *i. e.* a *Stage-player*, comes. But if according to others, *Hiſter* or *Iſter* ſignifies in general *Ludio*, *i. e.* a Player, then perhaps our Word *Jeſter* is originally the ſame. *N. B.* No *Ergo's* to be drawn from this.

(*b*) L'Apôtre entend par ce mot, *Plaiſanterie*, ces Buffoneries de Theatre, dans leſquelles, il ſemble que l'homme renounce a la Raiſon & bons ſens pour devenir la Risée du publique. *In locum.*

ſpect him much for his ingenious and learned Notes upon the *Bible*. Tho' you do not agree with *Eraſmus*, and moſt popiſh Commentators, yet you agree with Monſieur *Martin*, who is as willing as yourſelf, to ſave a little Facetiouſneſs, in private Converſation, out of the apoſtolical Prohibition; for which he ſacrifices all Comedies at leaſt. You will not part with them at any Rate; and therefore call upon *Ariſtotle* to help you to ſubſtitute (for ſomething muſt be forbidden) in place of Stage-plays, *a well bred Affront*. *A well bred Affront* is next to Nonſenſe in *Engliſh*; and I do not think you have mended the Matter much in the *Greek*. It was a very unlucky Thing, (and I am almoſt aſhamed to take Notice of it) that you did not ſay *Hybrin* inſtead of *Hybrida*. For your *Hybrida* is the Production of an Aſs, with a Mare, called a *Mule*: Or, it is a ſturdy Bird of Prey of the Nature of an Owl, a Kind of Night Bird, a proper Emblem of an *anonimous Critick*. And tho' you think, and ſeem to be poſitive, that *Ariſtotle*'s Authority in the Caſe, is of more Weight than an hundred modern *Lexicographers*, I, on the other Hand, am of Opinion, that the *Moderns* are much better

ter *Etymologiſts* than the *Ancients*. And my ingenious Friend, the Reverend Mr. *David* M'*Colm*, a Miniſter in the *Presbytery* of *Edinburgh*, knows more of the *Origine* of the *Greek* and *Latin* Languages, than the *Greeks* and *Romans* did themſelves.

AMONG the *Greeks* there were four Sorts of pleaſant or merry Men. The firſt were the *Epicharites* or *Epichareis*, the ſecond were the *Eutrapeli*; the third, the *Bomolochi*; and the fourth were the *Aiſchrologi*. The firſt of theſe, the *Epicharites*, were decent and inoffenſive, pleaſant and agreeable, *lepidi & jucundi*, and had nothing mean or blameable in their Way. Next to theſe were the *Eutrapeli*, and theſe were reckoned faulty, and had ſomething diſcreditable in their Manner of Mirth (*a*). The *Bomolochi* were yet worſe than theſe (*b*), and were much the ſame with the *Mologi* or *Moriones*, the *Merry Andrews* of the *Ro-*

(*a*) Animadvertes lepidos & ſalſos, quos vocant Ἐμμελεῖς in laude eſſe; *Eutrapelos* ſcurras, paraſitos in vitio, *apud Damaſſium de Iſidoro*. Julius Cæſar Bullengerus, de Theatro Lib. 1. Cap. 42. de apinariis & ridiculis. (*b*) Alia ſunt dicta jocularia & mimica quæ riſum excitant, & ab iis dicuntur quos Græci Εὐτραπέλους, *facetos* vocant, & *ſalſos*; aut ſi effuſi, aut impudenter ridiculi ſunt, Βωμολόχους, *ſcurras*. Idem ibid.

man *Theatre* (*c*). The *Aiſchrologi* or *filthy Speakers* were the worſt of all, and ſcarce had any Place or Poſt upon the Theatre, after the Suppreſſion of the *old Comedy*. And for this *Ariſtotle* (*d*) is my Witneſs, who ſays that the *Aiſchrologia* or *filthy ſpeaking* was the *Wit* of the *old Comedy*, and the *Eutrapelia*, the *Wit* of the *new*. And theſe three Orders of a diſgraceful Kind of merry Men, were ordinarily called the *Paraſites of Apollo*. All of them, likewiſe, have a Relation to the Stage, and were a Sort of Officers that belonged to the Theatre.

Now it is ſomething very remarkable, that the *Apoſtle* in the Text under Conſideration, *Eph.* v. 4. *Filthineſs, fooliſh Talking and Jeſting*, ſays nothing at all of the *Epicharites*, with whom the Heathens found no Fault; and that the other three are expreſly mentioned, with a Gradation, beginning with the worſt. Allowing, *Sir*, theſe three Words (*e*) uſed by the *Apoſtle* to be nearly related, or in ſome Meaſure *expletive*, or

(*c*) *Morologus* latius patet quam *Morio*, ſed pene idem ſunt. Idem ibid. (*d*) Ad Nicomach. Lib. 2. (*e*) Αισχρότης, or Αισχρολογια, Μωρολογια and Ευτραπελια.

or explanatory of one another (as you yourſelf obſerve in another Caſe) then the *Apoſtle's* Meaning is exceedingly neat and clean: But as you reſtrict the Senſe of one of them, they do not make up ſo good a *Set*, or agree ſo well together.

OBSERVE likewiſe that the Explication of the Paſſage, which I here make you a Preſent of, is very agreeable to what the *Apoſtle* adds by Way of Oppoſition: *Neither Filthineſs, nor fooliſh talking or jeſting*, which are not convenient, *but rather giving of thanks.* The *Religion* of the *Heathens* entred almoſt into all their Matters, and was a conſiderable Part of their Stage-plays. The Word here rendered *giving of Thanks* (*a*), was very early adopted by the primitive Chriſtians to ſignify the *Sacrament of the Lord's Supper*, at the Adminiſtration of which, they always ſung a *Hymn* of Praiſe and Thankſgiving. For which Reaſon, I am inclined to think, tho' I do not pretend to be poſitive, that the *Apoſtle's* Meaning is, *Your own Chriſtian Solemnity of the Lord's Supper becomes you better than the religious Diverſions of the Heathens.*

(*a*) Ευχαριστια.

Heathens. And a little lower, perhaps with Reſpect to the *Komoi* (of which immediately) we find the Apoſtle thus beſpeaking the *Epheſians* (*b*). *And be not drunk with Wine, wherein is Exceſs; but be filled with the Spirit, ſpeaking to yourſelves in Pſalms and Hymns, and ſpiritual Songs, making Melody in your Heart to the LORD.* And to the *Coloſſians* he ſays (*c*), *Let the Word of CHRIST dwell in you richly in all Wiſdom, teaching and admoniſhing one another in Pſalms and Hymns and ſpiritual Songs, ſinging with Grace in your Hearts to the LORD.* And ſo the Apoſtle *James* (*d*), *Is any Man merry*, or content, *let him ſing Pſalms*. All which become us better as we are *Chriſtians*, than the *Revellings*, and theatrical Diverſions of the *Heathens*.

OBSERVE further that the *adjective*, *not convenient*, as it is rendered, is in the *plural Number*, and affects *Filthineſs, fooliſh talking or jeſting*. And, I beg pardon to ſay it, you do not act a candid Part, when contrary both to the *Original*, and the *Tranſlation*, you put it in the *ſingular Number*, as

(*b*) Eph. v. 18, 19. (*c*) Col. iii. 16. (*d*) Jam. v. 13.

as if it belonged to *jesting* only. You say, *Sir, Filthiness, fooliſh Talking and inconvenient Jesting* is forbidden in Plays and every where else. And why not *inconvenient Filthiness?* The *Apoſtle* says so, and you might have followed him, had you thought it for your Purpoſe. I know your Diſtinction of *convenient* and *inconvenient Jesting* would serve a Turn at a Pinch. But you could not think that the Diſtinction of *convenient* and *inconvenient Filthiness*, was either *uſeful or Chriſtian.* You cut the Text in Pieces, and I keep it whole, which I am ſure is the beſt Way of explaining the *Holy Scriptures*, or any other *Writings.* Were there no Stage-plays in the Caſe, I am inclined to think, you would diſpute this Point no longer. The *Apoſtle* expreſly, and *in terminis*, mentions all the three Sorts of *theatrical Wit*, he mentions them likewiſe with a *Contre-relation* to the Solemnities and Duties of the *Chriſtian Religion.* And if any Body can think, that in theſe three theatrical Vices, *filthy ſpeaking, fooliſh talking and jesting*, he had no View to the Theatre itſelf, all I say is, ſtrong is his Prejudice and Preposſeſſion in Favour of the Stage. I had almoſt forgot to

Remark further, That in the Days of the Apoſtle *Paul*, the Theatre was rampant. The *Apoſtle* was well acquainted with the Terms of Art; For he wrote this Epiſtle to the *Epheſians* from *Rome*. Thoſe to whom he wrote, were as well acquainted with them, as was he himſelf. And whatever we, who live at this Diſtance of Time, think, they were in no Manner of Danger of Miſunderſtanding him. I think, *Sir*, I may now leave it to yourſelf to determine, notwithſtanding your Prejudices, whether or not the Word *Eutrapelia* ſignifies preciſely a *well-bred Affront* (for no more you will allow it to bear) or *theatrical Jeſting* and *Buffoonry*. Pray, *Sir*, look over my Paraphraſe upon theſe ſix Verſes again, tho' you have at firſt deſpiſed it, and conſider, as candidly as you can, what I have now ſaid in ſupport of it: And if I can ſo far prevail with you, I hope you'll be of another Mind as to the Lawfulneſs of *Stage-plays*. More, upon this Head, doth not occur to me at preſent, to convince you of your Miſtake. May God, by his Grace, ſupply what is wanting, and perſuade you, that you wrong the *Apoſtle's* Mean-

Meaning (I don't ſay induſtriouſly) only to favour the Stage. Judge now, as *Stews* are forbidden by the ſame Laws which forbid Uncleanneſs, whether or not, the Stage is forbidden by the ſame Law which forbids *Filthineſs, fooliſh Talking and Jeſting*, which are expreſly the Buffoonries of it? I can as little ſeparate, in my *Idea*, the Buffoonries of the Theatre from the Theatre, as you can ſeparate *Uncleanneſs* from *Stews*.

I ADMIT that I do take Notice of the Word *Revelling*, and explain it, becauſe, I thought, and think ſtill, that it is not commonly well enough underſtood. But to what Purpoſe do I *inſiſt upon the Force of it*? Is it to prove from our Tranſlation, that the *Apoſtles* forbid Stage-plays? That would be a very extraordinary Attempt indeed. Whatever you do, I hope no Body elſe will think me ſo ſtupid. But if *Revellings* takes in all publick Shews, and the Stage among the reſt, (I have a Decreet of the Lords of *Council* and *Seſſion* for what I alledge) and if the Word, in *England*, about the Time our Tranſlation was made, ſignified *Plays* and *Interludes* uſed in Noblemen's Houſes nd Inns of Court *(a)*, I hope I might very well

(*a*) Baillie's Dictionary.

well ſay, *It is therefore certain, that, in the Opinion of our Tranſlators, the Stage is condemned as Heathen and Unchriſtian.* This I ſay ſtill, and more than this I did not ſay before. You, *Sir*, have taken Occaſion from your own Miſtake to prove upon me, that by the Maſter of the Revels, is meant a *Juſtice* of the Peace. The *Morologi Moriones* and Merry Andrews were ſometimes allowed to laugh at their own ſilly Jeſts. Tho' *Revelling* may come from the *French* Word *Reveiller*, yet it was very good *Engliſh* when our Tranſlation was made. And both in *French* and *Engliſh*, it hath much the ſame Signification. For *Reveleux* ſignifies *Wanton*, *Laſcivious*, *Shameleſs* and *Unruly*. I ſuppoſe our Word *Reveldry* or *Ribaldry* (for *B.* and *V.* are often interchanged) comes from the Root *Revel*. For what I know, *Fencing Schools* are under the Office of the Maſter of the Revels, and an Act of Parliament, perhaps leſs, might put *Reading Schools* and *Writing Schools* under his Inſpection too. But all this notwithſtanding, I ſhould not think that our Tranſlators, by the Word *Revelling*, condemn the Uſe of Arms, Reading and Writing. And tho' *Rom.* xiii. they

have

have rendred *Komos* by *rioting*; (perhaps they had better retained the Word *Revelling*) and tho' they knew what a Tumult and Mob was, and what was the Office of a *Juſtice of the Peace*, yet I do not think that with all your Logicks and *Ergo*'s you can prove that they make a *Juſtice of the Peace* a Maſter of the *Mob*, or that a Juſtice, and a Maſter of the Revels, are the ſame Thing. This, *Sir*, I take to be one of your harmleſs Jeſts.

But, I think you are in earneſt, when after having made *Rioting* and *Revelling ſynonimous* Terms, you conclude that *Komos* and *Aſotia* are ſynonimous Terms too. I was always of Opinion, that a Tranſlation was to be corrected by the Original; and that our *Engliſh* is neither the Rule nor the Standard of explaining the *Greek*. And if your Argument is good *ad hominem*, you yourſelf muſt be the *Homo*. Pray, *Sir*, Don't be angry; for I cannot forbear to tell you, that this is *one of the idleſt Things, which you, as a Patron of the Stage, have dropt as the main Ground upon which you rely*, when from it you conclude, That the Apoſtle only forbids *exceſſive* merry-making,

or *filthy* Stage-plays; you might, with as good Grounds, have ſaid *filthy* merry-making and *exceſſive* Stage-plays.

As it is plain that it was the Opinion of our Tranſlators that Stage-plays are ſinful and unchriſtian, I ſaid and endeavoured to prove that they had not miſtaken the Meaning of the *Apoſtles*. And to this Purpoſe I alledge "That *Komos* is a Word of extenſive Signification, and takes in all vain, laſcivious, ludicrous and jocular Repreſentations; not only dancing and luxurious Feaſting, but wanton, light, and amorous Interludes (to which you add Flute-Muſick), and that I believe it is the very ſame from which the Word *Comedy* is derived." Out of all which you allow nothing to be both meaned and forbidden, but only an *Exceſs* of *Merry-making*, and a *Debauch* of *good Fellowſhip*. You *give up Interludes to ſeaſon Debauchery with all your Heart*. But you will not allow that *Komos* hath any Thing to do with vain, laſcivious, ludicrous and jocular Repreſentations. And tho' you allow that ſuch Interludes, commonly made Part of the Heathen *Merry-making*, and tho' I have proved from *Plutarch*, that they

they were the *Tip-top* of ſuch Entertainments, yet will you not allow them to come into the *Komoi*, nor ſuffer the Apoſtle to condemn them, tho' you condemn them yourſelf. O! *Dear Sir*, What is the Matter? What makes you ſo ſcanty, ſo ſcrimp, ſo niggardly an Interpreter of the holy Scriptures? By this obſtinate and barefac'd Evaſion of yours, you confirm me more and more in my Opinion, that *Komos* doth take in Interludes. *Dancing* and *Flute*-Muſick, you do allow ſometimes to go along with *Komos*, becauſe you think that no Body will condemn theſe as unchriſtian Diverſions. But Interludes of any Kind muſt have no relation to the Word, tho' it was thought by *Plutarch*, who knew thoſe Entertainments very well, that it was almoſt as impoſſible to make one of thoſe *Merry-makings*, without *Menander*, as without Wine; and tho' it was as uſual to ſend for Comedians on thoſe Occaſions, as it is now with us to ſend for Fidlers and Pipers to a Country Wedding; and tho' *Plutarch* tells us expreſly (*a*) that Muſick, Dancing, Farces and Jeſting, made up a great Part of Heathen Banqueting; and further ſays, That no Body can

(*a*) Sympoſ. Lib. 1. Queſt. 1.

can deny that *Komazo*, which, among other Things, ſignifies to celebrate and praiſe with Hymns and Songs, comes from *Komos* (*a*). And one of my modern *Lexicographers* ſays, That he who was the Subject of the Song or Poem, was called the Maſter of the *Komos* (*b*): So *Komax*, which ſignifies *a petulant, talkative*, but never a *drunken* or *gluttoniſh* Fellow, comes from *Komos*.

I DO allow that *Stephanus* had good Reaſon to tranſlate *Komos* by *Commeſſatio*; for *Plutarch* who lived long enough at *Rome* to underſtand *Latin*, made the ſame Tranſlation before him (*c*). But he writes *Comeſſatio*. And this *Comeſſatio* you take for the mere *eating* and *drinking* Part of *good Fellowſhip*. I believe you'll grant, that *Pliny* the *Second*'s panegyrical Oration to *Trajan* is one of the moſt exact and elaborate Pieces of all Antiquity, in which, ſome maintain there is not one ſuperfluous or ill choſen Word: And in that very Oration, he places *Commeſſatio* (for ſo I find it there writ-

(*a*) Sympoſ. Lib. 7. Queſt. 6. (*b*) Κωμος ὑμνητης, appellatur is in cujus laudem hymnus eſt ab aliquo ſcriptus. (*c*) Sym-

written) among the ludicrous Arts (*d*). So, *Sir*, you juſt gain nothing at all to your Purpoſe from the *Latin* Tranſlation of *Komos*, ſince the *Komos* of the *Greeks*, and the *Comeſſatio* of the *Romans*, were juſt of the ſame Kind and Natute. I fancy I am better founded to ſay, that *Komos* hath nothing to do with *eating* and *drinking*, than you are in ſaying that it hath nothing to do with *Interludes*. The *Latin* Word *Aſſare* ſignifies to ſing without a muſical Inſtrument, as it ſometimes, when the Inſtrument is ſubjoined, ſignifies *playing* without *ſinging*. And *Aſſamentum* ſignifies a Song or Poem of Praiſe, as *Komos* ſometimes doth. And what do you think, Sir? May not the Word in *Latin* be *Comaſſatio*? I pretend no Demonſtrations in Etymologies. However, I have *Urſinus* ſo far on my Side, that he ſays the Word ſhould be writ with *a*, and not with *e*. *Julius Cæſar Bulengerus* (*e*) ſays

Sympoſ. Lib. 7. Queſt. 6. (*d*) *Speaking of the Times of* Nero, *he ſays*, Et quis jam locus miſeræ adulationis manebat, quum laudes imperatorum, *ludis* etiam & *Commeſſationibus* celebrarentur, ſaltarenturque, atque in omne ludibrium effeminatis vocibus, modis, geſtibus frangerentur? Sed illud indignum quod eodem tempore, in ſenatu & in ſcena, ab hiſtrione & conſule laudebantur. Tu procul a tui culta *ludicras artes* removiſti. (*e*) Etymologicon Gerardi Joannis

Vciſii

ſays, That *Komazan* (*a*) ſignifies a merry *Mimick*. And now, *Sir*, tho' perhaps you will not, I hope others will allow, that *Komos*, among other Things, ſignifies Interludes, and that more properly than Exceſs in eating and drinking, which you reſtrict it to.

I GAVE it as my Opinion, that the Word *Comedy* comes from *Komos*. This you are pleaſed to call a Whim of a modern Critick *Scaliger*. I might ſteal this Authority from you to favour my own Cauſe ſo far as it goes, but until I ſee very good Reaſon to think otherwiſe, I rather believe he was on your Side. At leaſt *Julius Cæſar Scaliger* in his firſt Book of *Poeticks* (*b*), to me ſeems to ſay ſo. But had you yourſelf, *Sir*, found it out Yeſterday, I do think it much more ingenious and rational than what you have fixed upon, tho' ſupported with great Antiquity

Voiſii. (*a*) Dictus eſt Κωμαζων, *comazon*, quod mimus eſſet & ridiculus. *Apud Ziphilin.* de Theatro, Lib. 1. Cap. 42.

(*b*) Juventus vacui temporis otio atque licentia noctis abuſa, ſecuri vel heri, vel patroni, vel parentum, per pagos (nondum enim in urbes convenerant) diſcurrere: Legimus enim apud Livium comeſſationes, qui mos cum ipſo nomine ſimul ad nos deductas eſt, unde hos luſus quos vicatim exercerent, παρα την ωδην τας κωμας, apte comediam dixere.

ſiquity, comparatively ſpeaking. For reckoning from *Cadmus*, who firſt brought writing into *Greece*, the *Greek* had been a written Language nine hundred Years before *Ariſtotle*; ſo that with reſpect to the Riſe and Origine of the *Greek*, he was pretty much a Modern himſelf. He cou'd only gueſs at theſe Things, and ſo may we. Generally the Antients were but indifferent Etymologiſts (*b*). Of my Opinion, are *Bulengerus* (*c*), and *Gerardus Joannes Voiſſius* (*d*). It is true, *Voſſius* thinks that *Komos* is derived from *Chamus*, or, as it is in our Tranſlation, 1 *Kings* xi. 7. *Chemoſh*, the *Bacchus* of the *Moabites* for whom *Solomon* built a Temple; and likewiſe ſays that *Komos* was the God that preſided in the *Grecian* Comeſſations or riotous Feaſts; but all this notwithſtanding, he affirms that *Comedy* comes from the Word. I think it needleſs to name ſome other able Criticks, who are of the ſame Opinion: For I perceive their Authority hath no Credit with you. To this *Komos*, *Bacchus*, or *Chamus*, the Heathens conſecrated their *Bacchanals*, which conſiſted

I

(*b*) Witneſs Varro de Lingua Latina. (*c*) Orta eſt comedia ἀπὸ τῦ κωμαζειν ϗ ἄδειν. quod eſt *comeſſatum ire cantantes*. (*d*) Etymologicon: *And.* De Idolatria, Lib. 2. Cap.

ſiſted more of Plays and Diverſions than o eating and drinking. *Feaſting* and *playing* at firſt commonly went together, as we find in the Account which *Moſes* gives of the idolatrous Worſhip paid to the Golden-Calf, *Exod.* xxxii. 6. *And the People ſat down to eat and drink, and roſe up to play.* And they ate and drank, that they might dance and ſing, and play the better (*a*). For tho' the *Grecians*, a Nation of a light and gay Turn of Mind, could dance and ſing without Drink, yet other Nations, and particularly the *Romans* (*b*), thought it below their Majeſty and Gravity.

But after all, I cannot allow myſelf to think that the Heathen gods gave Names to Things. I rather believe that the gods of the Heathens had their Names from the Things over which they were placed as Preſidents and Protectors. Can any Man imagine that there never were any Songs of Mirth and Songs of Sorrow ſung, before the World had forſaken the Worſhip of the true God, and degenerated into the groſſeſt Idolatry? To ſuppoſe the contrary, were, in my Opinion, to do Idolatry too much Honour, by making it almoſt co-eval with Man-

Cap. 6. (*a*) Nemo ſobrius ſaltat. *Cicero.* (*b*) Cornelius Nepos Vita Epominod.

Mankind. It is natural for People to rejoice and be merry, when they ſucced in their Undertakings, and find themſelves at eaſe; and to be ſorry when under Adverſity, Calamity and Diſappointment. And to commemorate great Bleſſings, and great Diſtreſs, they ſoon learned to ſing Songs of Mirth and of Lamentation. In *Ireland*, and in our own little Country, juſt at our Door, the ancient Inhabitants have ſuch Songs, and are accuſtomed to ſing them on ſuitable Occaſions. And theſe they never learned from *Jews* or *Chriſtians*, *Greeks* or *Romans*. The gathering in of the Harveſt, or the Vintage, was to the ancient Inhabitants of the Earth, a proper Occaſion for Songs of Mirth and Gladneſs; and to which the *Pſalmiſt* alludes, when he ſays (*a*), *Thou haſt put Gladneſs in my Heart, more than in the Time when their Corn and their Wine increaſed.* Of this Time and Occaſion of rejoicing, *Horace*'s (*b*) Account ſeems natural enough. And that the People of *Iſrael* might not forget their Gratitude to

(*a*) Pſal. iv. 7.

(*b*) Agricolæ priſci ſortes, parvoque beati
Condita poſt frumenta, levantes tempore feſti
Corpus & ipſum animum——
Epiſtol. Lib. 2. Epiſt. 1.

God on these joyful Occasions, he instituted, by the Ministry of *Moses* (*c*), *The Feast of Ingathering, which is in the End of the Year, when thou hast gathered in thy Labour out of the Field.* And that beautiful parabolical Song, *Isa.* v. 1.—*Now will I sing to my Well-beloved a Song of my Beloved, touching his Vineyard,* &c. hath an Allusion to these Vintage-songs, which the Prophet ironically, but most elegantly turns to the sorrowful Strain: And *Athenæus* says (*d*), that the ancient *Grecians* used Tragedy and Comedy at the Time of the Vintage, called in *Greek* Τρυγητος, *Trigetos*, from whence some derive the Word *Tragedy* (*e*). I do think, Sir, that of all the *Greek* Derivations of the Word, you have chosen the worst, when you make *Tragedy* signify a *Song of a Goat.* For when *AEschylus* had introduced that pompous Sort of dramatical Entertainment upon the *Athenian* Theatre, the People used to say, *What Business hath Bacchus with this.* I can no more believe that Tragedy did originally signify a Song of a Goat, than it signified

(*c*) Exod. xxiii. 16. (*d*) Lib. 2. (*e*) Aristophanis scholiastes, *in nubibus*, says that an Actor of ancient Fables was called Τρυγωδαιμων.

fied *a Tale of a Tub*, or that Comedy ſignifies a *Song of a Village* than that it ſignifies *a Story of a Cock and a Bull.* In this I give Mr. *M'Colm* Credit, who makes *Tragedy* in the *old Celtick* Language, ſignify a Song of Sorrow. And Comedy, *antithetically* conſidered, muſt ſignify a Song of Mirth. If you will not take this upon my Word, you may, conveniently enough converſe with the Gentleman himſelf, who can ſatisfy you as to this Particular, and likewiſe, in Thouſands of Inſtances, can ſhew that there is a ſurprizing Affinity betwixt the *Celtick* and the *Greek*, and many other Languages. You ſee, *Sir*, what Reaſons I have for ſaying, that *Komos* ſignifies *Interludes*, and that *Comedy* comes from it.

But, tho' you ſhould grant me all this, I know you have one Reaſon left againſt Stage-plays being comprehended in the apoſtolical Prohibition, mentioned *Gal.* v. 1. 1 *Pet.* iv. 3. *Rom.* xiii. 12. That is, whatever of that Nature paſt at the Heathen Merry-makings, or *Comeſſations*, yet regular Comedy, and far leſs Tragedy, could have no Place in their riotous Feaſts. I allow

allow it. For *Plutarch*, who knew them very well, ſays that Tragedy was both impracticable and improper on theſe Occaſions. But, dear Friend, if thoſe irregular Plays are forbidden (and you yourſelf condemn them), I am very poſitive that the moſt regular Plays go along with them. For the better Order you put them in, and the more magnificent and expenſive you make them, ſo much the worſe are they. A Father (*f*) of the Church thinks ſo, when he ſays, *the Devil hath formed Plays and Feſts into an Art.* If Stage-plays are forbidden in their firſt Elements and Rudiments, it follows, *a fortiori* that they are forbidden in their Perfection, and greateſt Improvements. If it is a Sin to divert ourſelves with Revellings, it is ſtill a greater Sin to dreſs up theſe Revellings with Pomp and Magnificence, with Art and Eloquence, and all the Beauties of Poetry, to render them the more diverting and inticing. All the Difference betwixt the *Komoi* or *Comeſſations*, and regular Comedy and Tragedy, is that the one is a more expenſive and alluring Sin than the other.

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(*f*) Chyrſoſtom. Hom. 8. in Mat.

I SHOULD now proceed to consider the Advantages which you say may accrue to us from your well regulated Stage, and that in a natural, civil and christian Capacity. But I must first consider your Scheme of *Reformation*. For this, *Sir*, the World hath waited in vain these Two Thousand Three Hundred Years. And if you, in good earnest, expect it, I must say, tender is your Concern; in those sublime and edifying Diversions, strong is your profane Faith, and great are your Tragi-comical Hopes. I say, if you expect it in good earnest. For I can scarce think you do, when you ask leave to differ from me *in an abstract and theoretical Point*. I think you cannot mean that the Lawfulness or Sinfulness of the Stage is an abstract and theoretical Point; because that is not a *speculative* but a *practical* Matter. If not, I have always been mistaken in my Notion of *Theory* and *Practice*. If it could agree with what you say about *Cato* and the *Funeral*, I should take your Meaning to be, " Supposing the Reformation of the Stage " possible, the Question betwixt you and " me is, whether upon this Supposition, and

" which

" which is no more than a mere Suppoſiti-
" on, ſuch a reformed Stage comes into the
" Apoſtolical Prohibtion"? But I am entire-
ly at a Loſs, what to make of this abſtract theoretical Point, when you ſay (*a*), That the Looſeneſs and Immorality of the Stage in Time paſt, " doth not hinder the Rule
" to be good; and the Execution of it is
" far from being impracticable; nay, there
" are Offices in Being, which if duly ex-
" erciſed, would cut off all Complaints, and
" this Rule, in general, you ſum up in two
" admirable Lines of Mr. *Pope*.

" *Such ſounds* (b) *alone ſhould pleaſe a*
British *Ear*,
" *As* Cato's *ſelf had not diſdain'd to*
hear.

" And in Place of *Cato*, you allow me to
" put in Mr. *Chillingworth*, or the late ex-
" cellent Principal *Hamilton*." None of the Three, ſo far as I know, have left us any written Directions about Stage-Plays: And of the Three, I only knew Principal *Hamilton*, and eſteemed him much. But

(*a*) Pag. 7.

(*b*) *Pope* ſays, *Plays* a better Word than *Sounds*.

I find

I find if I take out *Cato*, *Chillingworth* or *Hamilton*, would take up too much Place in the Line. What think you of the Apoſtle *Peter*? Might not that do as well? And then the Line would ſtand.

As Peter's *ſelf had not diſdain'd to hear.*

But when I conſider again, that it is not the Practice of any Man, no, not the Example of an Apoſtle, or of a Miniſter of *Edinburgh*, that is to be a Rule and Standard of our Morality, I do not think it worth the Pains to make any Alteration. We are to be Followers of none, but in ſo far as they are Followers of CHRIST. And for this Reaſon I cannot think with you, that Mr. *Pope*'s Words are admirable, becauſe they cannot ſerve us as a Rule in judging, which is a clean, and which is unclean an Play. And for the Poeſy of them, I have read better in *Sternhold* and *Hopkins*. However, you come cloſer to the Point of a pratical Reformation of the Theatre, by propoſing *Cato* a Tragedy, and the *Funeral* a Comedy for Standards. I am much obliged to you, for inſtancing no more ſuch Performances. It is now full Twenty Years

ſince I thought the Stage an unchriſtian Diverſion, and on that Account I have loſt all Taſte of Stage Poems, and have given over reading of Plays; tho' I cannot ſay, but ſince that Time, I have read very bad Books in the Way of my Profeſſion. And upon your Recommendation, I have taken the Trouble to read your Patterns, and am far from being ſatisfied with the Swatch. Men are very fond of their own Projects, and are apt to believe Things very eaſy and practicable, until they begin to try the Execution of them. And you think you could eaſily bring to bear, what Men of great Knowledge of *Things* and *Men*, what Men of Power and Capacity have given over. The Fathers never propoſed a Reformation of the Stage, even when the Empire was in Chriſtian Hands. Betwixt an unlimited Toleration of the Theatre, and total Suppreſſion of it, Hiſtory ſhews, that a *Medium* hath been of little avail. It is true there was a Law made in *England*, in the Reign of King *James* I. of that Kingdom, inflicting Mulcts and Penalties upon theſe Actors of Plays, " who ſhould re-
" cite or interpret Scripture, or revile the
" Sacraments, or the Book of Common
" Praye

" Prayer, or any Part thereof, or jeſtingly " and prophanely uſe the Name of GOD the " FATHER, or of CHRIST JESUS, or " of the HOLY GHOST, or of the TRI- " NITY, in any Interludes, Stage-Plays, " Rimes or *Pageants*. And the Reaſon is good and chriſtian, that is, *Becauſe the Name of* GOD *is never to be uſed but with Fear and Reverence*. And tho' the *Reaſon* is of a moral and chriſtian Nature, and thus the Law is enforced with divine and humane Authority; yet the Impudence of Stage Poets and their Actors, have ſucceſsfully defeated it. At *Athens*, where the Stage was under the Direction of the Senate, and eſteemed a Matter highly worth the Regard of the State, there were ſeveral Laws made about the Regulation of it. *Themiſtocles* made a Law, that no Magiſtrate ſhould reſort to the Theatre; and long before his Time, it was a Cuſtom long obſerved, not to admit any one upon the Theatre, but ſuch as ſung or ſaid honeſt Things. *Alcibiades*, for the Impudence of *Ariſtophanes*, obtained a Law againſt the old Comedy. In the LXXXV. *Olympiad* there was a Law enacted againſt all Comedies; but this Law within leſs than four

Years was repealed. But with all their Care, and all their Regulations, these *Athenians* at last found, that the best Way was to abdicate the Theatre altogether. It would be tedious to run thro' all the Affronts the Stage hath received from Heathen and from Christian States, from Fathers and Philosophers, from Politicians antient and modern; and all the Disgrace and Infamy that hath been put upon it, by Civil and by Canon Law. None of these that oppose the Stage ever dreamed of a *Reformation*, as a sufficient Redress of the Grievances arising from it. But, Sir, the Matter betwixt you and me is so contracted, that it becomes unnecessary to turn over History to know the Opinion of the World about the Stage, as used in different Nations, and different Ages: And if I did, the Judgment of the World must come out against you. And you your self acknowledge, that to this Day your Reformation is wanting, and, I believe will be to the End of the World, even to bring it to your own Standard of *Cato*. Of this Opinion is Sir *Richard Blackmore*, a Person as well acquainted with the Nature and Management of

of the Play-houſe as your ſelf. Tho' I do not know you, I may ſay it at a Ventuer.

THAT worthy Gentleman ſays (*a*), "The "chief Cauſe of the Immorality of the "Theatre, is the ill Taſte of the People, "who notwithſtanding they have applaud-"ed ſeveral clean and regular Tragedies, "ſuch as *Cato*,—yet ſtill frequent and "encourage the looſeſt Comedies. It "happens that the greateſt Part of Men "of Wit and Humour, who not being "eaſy in their Fortunes, work for the "Stage, and are daily Labourers for the "Muſes, ly under a Neceſſity of bring-"ing thoſe Productions to the Market, "which are in Faſhion, and therefore "vendible, whilſt others, tho' of ever ſo "much greater Value, would be turned "back upon their Hands. Nor would the "Actors, who live by their Employments, "as the Comick-writers do by theirs, un-"dertake to repreſent an innocent, and "much leſs a Comedy of much higher "Merit. Tho' ſeveral Aſſaults have been "made upon the Comick-poets in Faſhion, "and many Batteries have been raiſed "againſt

(*a*) Preface to his Eſſays, Page 44, *anno* 1716.

" againſt the Theatre, yet hitherto they
" have proved unſucceſsful. The Stage
" is become impregnable, where looſe
" Poets, ſupported by Numbers, Power
" and Intereſt, in Defiance of all Rules of
" Decency and Virtue, ſtill produce new
" Snares and Temptations to ſeduce the
" People, and corrupt their Manners, not-
" withſtanding the earneſt Cries of this
" great City that importune theſe Writers
" to reform the Theatre, and no longer
" to infect her Youth, and draw their In-
" clinations from their Profeſſions and Em-
" ployments; notwithſtanding the Sighs and
" and Tears of many once flouriſhing, but
" now diſconſolate Families, ruined by the
" diſſolute Lives of their chief Branches,
" who loſt their Virtue by frequenting the
" fatal Entertainments of the Theatre;
" notwithſtanding the wiſe and ſober Part
" of the Kingdom, earneſtly ſolicite them
" to ſpare the People, to ſtop the ſpread-
" ing Plague, and ſtay the deſtroying Pen,
" they perſevere with intrepid Reſolution,
" and inexorable Cruelty to poiſon the
" Minds, and ruin the Morals of the Na-
" tion. The Actors, we may ſafely con-
" clude, are not reſtrained by ſuch rigor-

ous

" ous Precepts of Virtue, but that they
" will always be inclined to preſent thoſe
" Performances, which will beſt fill the
" Houſe, and promote their Intereſt; and
" therefore they will readily humour the
" vitiated Taſte of the Audience, by act-
" ing the moſt immoral Plays, whilſt they
" find their Account in doing ſo: And that
" which confirms this Obſervation, is, that
" they never, as far as I have heard, re-
" jected any Comedy merely for its Looſe-
" neſs, tho' I believe they have rejected
" many for Want of that entertaining
" Quality."

You ſee, *Sir*, there's no Reformation of the Stage to be expected, either from Poets, or from Actors, or from the Audience. The Plays corrupt the Audience, and the Audience in their Turn, ſpoil the Plays. Before the Looſeneſs and Immorality of the Theatre can be corrected, the Minds of the People muſt be firſt endued with a virtuous Taſte. And for this, the Stage neceſſarily wants foreign Aſſiſtance: And therefore, as you deſire to ſee the happy Day, when Theatrical Performances ſhall ſhine with *a juſt Dignity and a chaſte Morality*;

Morality; do not contemn or diſcredit the Preaching of the Gospel. Take my Advice (and I give to you as to a Child) don't diſparage the Preaching of the Word of God and of Salvation, by comparing it with dramatical Performances. For the Gospel in itſelf is ſtubborn, and will not yield to the wicked Cuſtoms of the World; And when the Miniſters of it, faithfully declare the whole Counſel of their great Lord and Maſter, there are Hopes the Minds of the Hearers may be informed with other and more commendable Notions of Things, than ſuch as they now learn from the Theatre.

I ſaid, "That it is not in Point to argue that Stage-plays are not, nor can be condemned by the Gospel, becauſe, when well reformed, there is nothing in them contradictory to natural Morality or good Reaſon." So that if I have proved that the Stage is condemned in the holy Scriptures, it is more than my Undertaking obliges me to, to conſider the Subject-matter of Plays, and all the Reformation which they are capable to admit. I have taken a ſhorter Way, and, I think, have ſucceeded

ſucceded in it. I know that both you and others think I ſhould have rather attacked the Stage from the Nature of the Thing, and ſhown by the Notion of Morality, that it was immoral; and then concluded that it was forbidden by the Gospel. A Gentleman of a neighbouring Kingdom, an Officer in the *French* Army, upon the taking of a Town in *Flanders* in which he was, told a Countryman of mine, that the Confederates had attaked the Town in the wrong Place; for if they had attacked it any where elſe, the Garriſon could have defended it ten Days longer. And I was of Opinion that to attack the Stage, juſt upon the Immorality of the Thing, would be an endleſs Work. However, *Sir*, to humour you a little,

Let the Stage be reformed, even beyond the Standards of *Cato* and the *Funeral*, I cannot think you would exclude all vitious Characters from Plays. If you did, they would make but poor Pictures, all Lights without Shades. And as Oppoſites illuſtrate one another, Virtue itſelf would loſe much of the Advantages with which Dramatick Poets pretend to ſet it off. Now, whilſt

the wicked, profane and villainous Part is acted, and the moſt horrid Criminals (as is uſual in Tragedy) are repreſented; the Author firſt, the Actors next, and then the whole Audience, enter deep into all the Paſſions. It would diſcover a Want of Taſte, and an inſenſible and obſtinate Stupidity, not to be moved with ſuch lively Repreſentations. *Plutarch*, I am ſure, ſomewhere ſays, " That he who is moſt " deceived with Plays, beſt anſwers their " End and Purpoſe." And can you think that a good Chriſtian ſhould allow himſelf either in Jeſt or in Earneſt to be wrought up to the Height of wicked, impious and immoral Paſſions. And that the Audience as well as the Actors enter into all the Humours that are brought upon the Stage, is evident from their loud Laughter, and from their Tears as Occaſion moves them. We ſhould, in my humble Opinion, baniſh intirely from our Minds, all wild, immoral, boiſterous, furious and impious Ideas, as we would preſerve our Souls fit and living Temples of the HOLY GHOST. And perhaps I might ſay, that the Apoſtle (*a*) had ſomething like this in View, when he ſays, *Let*

(*a*) Eph. iv. 29.

Let no corrupt Communication proceed out of your Mouth, but that which is good to the Uſe of edifying, that it may miniſter Grace unto the Hearers; and grieve not the Holy Spirit *of* God, *whereby ye are ſealed unto the Day of Redemption.* And ſure I am it can adminiſter no Grace either to the Actors or Audience, to hear *Sempronius*'s dying Speech in your Standard *Cato* (*b*).

Curſe on my Stars! am I then doom'd to fall,
By a Boy's Hand? diſfigured in a vile
Numidian *Dreſs, and for a worthleſs Woman?*
Gods! I am diſtracted! This my Cloſe of Life.
O! for a Peal of Thunder that would make
Earth, Sea and Air, and Heav'n and Cato *tremble.*

I acknowledge this is very cloſs in poetick Character, but I think it inconſiſtent with our Chriſtian Character, to ſuffer ſuch Ideas as theſe Words convey, to enter into our Minds. And though they ſhould be denied Acceſs by the more judicious Minds, yet how muſt the Actor be affected when he ſtrains and ſtrives to become the bold proud Villain whom he perſonates. And

(*b*) Act iv. Scene 2.

we make the Actor's Fault become our own, when for our Sake, and for our Applauſe and Encouragement, he defiles his own Soul, with acting the wickedeſt Things of the wickedeſt Men. A Father of the Church (*a*), his paternal Authority a Part, hath well ſaid, "Other Crimes only "pollute thoſe that commit them, but Plays "make Actors and Spectators equally guil-"ty: For whilſt theſe willingly look on, "and by that Means approve thoſe, they "become guilty of the Sin mentioned *Rom.* "i. 32. *Who knowing the Judgment of* "*God, (that they who commit ſuch Things* "*are worthy of Death) not only do the* "*ſame, but have Pleaſure in them that do* "*them.*"

After writing this, I peruſed *the Prince of* Conti's *Treatiſes againſt Shews*, and I had ſome Thoughts of ſubſtituting his Words in Place of the preceeding Paragraph: But perhaps it may be better rather to give you both, that I may bear home the Argument with the more Force.

It

(*a*) Salvianus de gubernatione Dei.

" It is impoſſible, *ſays he* (*a*), to conſi-
" der the Buſineſs of a Player, and to com-
" pare it with the Chriſtian Profeſſion, with-
" out being ſenſible, that there is nothing
" more unworthy of a Child of GOD, and
" of a Member of Jesus Christ, than this
" Employment. I do not ſpeak of the
" groſs Immoralities only, and the diſſo-
" lute Manner in which the Women appear
" on the Stage, becauſe thoſe who juſtify
" Plays, always ſeparate thoſe Sort of Diſ-
" orders from them in their Imagination,
" though they are never ſeparated in Effect.
" I ſpeak only of that which is abſolutely
" inſeparable from them. 'Tis an Employ-
" ment, the End of which is the Diverſion
" of others: Where Men and Women ap-
" pear on a Theatre to repreſent the Paſ-
" ſions of Hatred, Anger, Ambition, Re-
" venge, and chiefly that of Love, they
" muſt expreſs them as lively and as natu-
" rally as is poſſible for them; and they
" cannot do ſo, if they do not in ſome
" Manner excite them in themſelves, and
" if their Souls do not take all the Changes
" which we ſee in their Faces. Thoſe
" then who repreſent a Paſſion of Love,
muſt

(*a*) Second Treatiſe, p. 1.

" muſt be in ſome Meaſure touched with
" it whilſt they repreſent it; and it is not
" to be imagined, that they can preſently
" efface from their Minds that Impreſſion,
" which they have voluntarily excited, and
" that it doth not leave a great Diſpoſition
" to that ſame Paſſion, which they have
" been ſo willingly ſenſible of. Thus Plays
" are even in their Nature a School and
" Exerciſe of Vice, ſince it is an Art in
" which one muſt neceſſarily excite in him-
" ſelf vicious Paſſions. And if we conſider,
" that the whole Life of Players is employ-
" ed in this Exerciſe, that they paſs it in-
" tirely either in learning by themſelves, or
" rehearſing among one another, or in re-
" preſenting it to Spectators, the Image of
" ſome Vice; and that they have ſcarce
" any Thing in their Minds but theſe Fol-
" lies; we ſhall eaſily ſee, that it is impoſ-
" ſible to join this Employment with the
" Purity of our Religion. And thus it muſt
" be owned, that it is a prophane Employ-
" ment, and unworthy of a Chriſtian; that
" thoſe who exerciſe it are obliged to leave
" it, as all the Councils command them:
" And that by Conſequence it is not al-
" lowable to others to contribute to main-
" tain

" tain them in a Profeſſion contrary to " Chriſtianity, or to authoriſe it by their " Preſence."

THE Reaſon, Sir, why you and every Body call for a Reformation of the Stage, is, that there are a great many undecent Things ſaid upon it; that Expreſſions too leud and prophane, and Speeches too bold and impious, enter into dramatical Compoſitions; for tho' they be never ſo much in Character, there's no good Man that can bear them. Some Vices, or ſome Repreſentations of Vices are ſo groſs, that they offend a Chriſtian and virtuous Mind, and this Offence being occaſioned by the Sinfulneſs and Vice of the Imagery, it follows, that all vicious Characters whatever have ſomething in them very remote from Morality and Chriſtianity. A very wicked and very leud Repreſentation, and ſuch a vicious Repreſentation as rather pleaſes than offends an Audience, are both of them unchriſtian, and differ only in *Degree*.

You are pleaſed, Sir, to ſtate a Caſe for primitive and apoſtolical Deciſion. Your Words are, "Should this Queſtion have

" been

" been propoſed in the primitive Times,
" whether ſuch Entertainments were to
" have been encourged, or totally prohibit-
" ed? I imagine the Anſwer would have
" been given without Heſitation, That what-
" ever was conducive to the Practice of
" Virtue, inſtead of being unlawful, is Praiſe-
" worthy." And I imagine the Anſwer you make is but ſhifting the Queſtion. The Plays as they were, as they are, or as you would have them, muſt be ſuppoſed under the Conſideration of an apoſtolical or a very early Chriſtian Council. And then, I muſt think, the Anſwer would have been, *Aboliſh totally*; and not your general *Norman* Anſwer, which leaves Place for a ſecond Conſultation, becauſe the Difficulty lies in applying the general Maxim to the particular Caſe. You have unluckily appealed to the primitive Chriſtians and Fathers: For though they had Stage-plays often under their Conſideration, they never once propoſed a Reformation, but always condemned them *ſimpliciter*.

I PROMISED to remember that it is your Opinion that *the Abuſe of the Stage tends to enervate the Minds of the People, and to pre-*

prepare them for Slavery, With many Politicians you agree in this Particular. And how then comes it to paſs that you are ſo fond of the Stage, as to think it worth your Pains to attempt the Defence of a reformed Stage, which the World hath no Reaſon to hope for. Had it not been more adviſeable, more Chriſtian, to have ſuffer'd a very few good Plays, according to your own Account, to have periſhed with a Multitude of bad ones, than for the Sake of your long expected Reformation, to preſerve a dangerous and enſlaving Theatre. The Stage, like ſome old faulty and ruinous Houſe, ſhould rather be pulled down than repaired; and the very Rubbiſh ſhould be entirely removed in order to clear the Ground for a new Foundation. My Friend, It is pleading for a well regulated Stage (and I know none that defend it upon any other Footing) that hath kept wicked and immoral Plays ſo long in Reputation. Our Country, till of late, was unacquainted with the Theatre, and yet our People were fully as moral and as religious before, as ſince a Play-houſe hath been erected for the Improvement of their Minds and Manners. And yet one would think, by your Plead-

ings, that the Theatre was abſolutely neceſſary for the Reformation of the World.

I SHALL ſuppoſe, that to anſwer the *Prince of Conti*'s Objection and mine, you ſhould take out of Plays every vile and wicked Character, and that nothing ſhall be heard upon the Stage that can offend a Chriſtian Ear; but all ſhall be ſtrict *Morality*, *morally* taught; then you and I may bid Farewel to one another. For I oppoſe the Stage only as an Unchriſtian *Diverſion*, and ſuch a Stage as this, would be no Diverſion at all. The Theatre then would become a *Porticus*, a School of moral Philoſophy, againſt which I am not obliged, by the Title of my Appendix, to ſay a Word. But that the Stage is a Means of Inſtruction, is a mere Pretence unſeaſonably inſiſted on, when an *index expurgatorius* is as much wanting as ever. Tho' Muſick and Poetry have been made Uſe of for religious Purpoſes, and have been employed in the Praiſe and Adoration of our great GOD and CREATOR, yet it hath commonly been perverted to Diverſion. And tho' in Poems, whether *Epick* or *Dramatick*, there are here and there ſome moral and religious Sentiments

ments interſperſed, yet all of them taken together do not amount to one Tenth Part of the Morality contained in *Solomon's Proverbs*, or the Tenth Part of the Devotion to be found in his Royal Father's *Pſalms*. The Heathens, at leaſt moſt of them, intended no more than Diverſion in their theatrical Poems. When the Stage was put in Repute in *France*, during the Miniſtry of Cardinal *Richelieu*, Diverſion was the only Aim. In the Days of King *Charles* the Firſt, Sport and Diverſion was all the Uſe pretended to be made of Stage-plays. And now to begin to talk of theſe Plays as a Means of Inſtruction, as noble and ſublime, as the warmeſt Incentives to Virtue, and the moſt powerful Preſervatives againſt Vice, is to ſpeak of them, not as *Plays*, but as Lectures of Morality, it is to anticipate the Commendation of a Thing not yet in Being, and to ſubſtitute ſome new imaginary Method of Inſtruction in place of them. I remember to have ſeen, in the Hands of Mr. *Charles Gildon*, a Project of his in Manuſcript, for promoting Virtue and Morality. But tho' he himſelf was a Dramatick Poet, he removed it from the Play-houſe and the dramatical Method. Some ingenious Per-

ſon was to compoſe a Speech, with all the Flowers of Oratory and Rhetorick, and then he himſelf, if duly qualified, or another Perſon indued with all the Graces and Advantages of ſpeaking, was to pronounce it in a Houſe to be built for that Purpoſe in the Center of *Lincoln's-Inn-Square*. And *Sir*, if you intend to reform the Stage from all Unchriſtian Expreſſions, and convert it into a Chapel of Eaſe for Lectures of Morality and Virtue (which I think is not much wanted at preſent), there's one Thing which I take the Freedom to put you in Mind of, that is, to employ no Preachers of Morality but ſuch whoſe Lives are moral. For when it happens that a Miniſter of the Gospel ſpeaks ſuch Things as bear hard upon the Hearers, his Life and Converſation is diligently ſearched into, in order to find out ſome Faults of his to excuſe their own. Your Actors, or Orators muſt be brought into Repute. For there's nothing more abſurd than to value the Art, and at the ſame Time to deſpiſe the Artiſt. You muſt try if you can prevail with the Univerſity of *Edinburgh* or *Herderwick* to make them *Doctors* of moral Eloquence. And after all, I would gladly know what great

great Difference there would be betwixt turning all Play-houſes into philoſophical Churches, and ſhutting them up altogether. I am afraid, *Sir*, your Audience would be very thin, and if your Moral Lectures were as expenſive as are the preſent Plays, your Doors would ſhut of their own Accord. But while your ſublime Method of promoting Virtue is ſtill carried on in the dramatick Way, tho' no worſe Performances ſhould ever come upon the Stage than *Cato*, or the *Funeral*, I do think they are actually forbidden in the GOSPEL, and are ſinful and unchriſtian in themſelves.

I THINK, *Sir*, you inſinuate (*a*), that *Tragedy* ſtands clear of all apoſtolical Prohibition, becauſe it never was a Part of the *Komoi* or *Comeſſations*: It is very like; for, as I obſerved from *Plutarch*, it was both improper and impracticable. The Machinery uſed in it would have made it an Entertainment fit only for a State, or a powerful and wealthy Prince, to have treated with. But do you think, that it ſtands as clear of *Filthineſs, fooliſh Talking and Jeſting?* If Tragedies were not cleaner than your Stan-

(*a*) Page 21.

Standard *Cato*, there was both Filthineſs and fooliſh Talking in them. By fooliſh Speaking I do not mean the *merry Andrew*'s Part, but much idle and unprofitable Speaking; and this, you ſay, is loudly exclaimed againſt in the Holy Scriptures. It is a long expenſive Tale, finely gilded over with the Beauties of Poeſy, and all to very little Purpoſe at beſt. The Moral of Plays is commonly ſumm'd up in the laſt Lines; and *Cato* concludes

From hence let fierce contending Nations know
What dire Effects from civil Diſcord flow:
'Tis this that ſhakes our Country with Alarms,
And gives up Rome *a Prey to* Roman *Arms;*
Produces Fraud, and Cruelty, and Strife,
And robs the guilty World of Cato's *Life.*

And I have ſeen more Senſe much better inforced in an *eighteenthly* of a Sermon, than theſe ſix Lines contain. Civil Diſcords did deprive the World of the Life of a Man, who choſe rather to take it away with his own horrid Hand, than to enjoy it by the good Will and Favour of *Cæſar*. A Man who would not wait for better Times, nor ſee his Country governed but

but in his own Way. The Speech of *Sempronius* (*a*) is ſo naughty, that I forbear to tranſcribe it. Tragedies are in themſelves worſe than Comedies. My Reaſons I have given already. Comedies of low Life, are the moſt harmleſs, or might be made the moſt harmleſs of all; and yet theſe are forbidden, *Epheſ.* v. 4. And tho' *Arlequin's* Jokes may be harmleſs in themſelves, and tho' the *Morologia* of the *Moriones* of the *Roman* Theatre might have been innocent too, yet Chriſtians are not allowed to divert themſelves with them. The Stage defiled them, and ſo doth it defile Tragedies, tho' they were not ſinful and unchriſtian in themſelves. The Argument acquires Force when applied to them. At beſt they were, and are but *Plays*, an improper Kind of Jeſts, Fictions of Fictions, Shadows of Shadows, full of ſuperfluous, unprofitable, filthy, wicked and hurtful Speaking. If the Apoſtle hath directly condemned one Branch of dramatical and theatrical Entertaiment more inoffenſively managed by *Menander*, than the other Part was managed by *Æſchylus*, *Sophocles*, *Euripides*, or any other Tragick Poet that I know of; (for there's no more of

(*a*) Act iii. Scene 7.

of the *Grecians* have had their Works preſerved, and I cannot think, that *Seneca*'s Tragedies were known when the Apoſtle wrote to the *Epheſians*) I am as well perſuaded as I can be of any Thing, that he did not except Tragedy when he condemned Comedy. I doubt if in the Apoſtle's Days there were any Tragedies acted; at leaſt nothing occurs to me at preſent, to induce me to think that there were. A Man muſt not without very good Grounds be poſitive as to an hiſtorical *Negative*: I therefore leave this Matter of Fact undetermined.

SIR, I took notice, that it is commonly pleaded for the Stage, that it recommends Virtue and ridicules Vice; that is, when it is any ways regular; for often it recommends Vice and ridicules Virtue, juſt as the Poet and Audience can agree. But ſuppoſing the beſt, that Virtue is never dreſſed up in a ridiculous Manner, and that Sin and Wickedneſs is never put in an honourable Apparel, and that many, take their Word, are edified by them. Suppoſing, I ſay all this as true, as it is falſe in Fact, the Thing is prohibited, and we ought to for-

forbear. And if I have proved the Divine Prohibition, all you ſay, or can ſay, tho' you ſhould ſay twenty Times more than is true in Favour of the Stage, and all the happy Effects it might have upon us as we are Men and Chriſtians, is entirely out of the Caſe; becauſe Things innocent and even uſeful in themſelves, may be forbidden by a divine Law, even when the ſafe uſe of them is not *next to impoſſible*; ſo that your Inſinuation of the Loſs which Mankind might ſuſtain in their Civil and Chriſtian Capacities, ſhould they be deprived of a well regulated Stage, can never weaken any ſcriptural Proof, which I have brought againſt it. But the Truth is, the World can ſuffer nothing at all by a total Abrogation of Stage-Plays; For as I have ſaid, "GOD "hath provided another Way for the Re"formation and Salvation of a loſt World, "and they are therefore out of their Duty, "who have recourſe to any prohibited "Means for attaining that great and glori"ous End. And what did all the Wit and "Wiſdom, all the Poeſy and Proſe, all the "Eloquence and Oratory of the World, a"vail, towards the Reformation of Man"kind, before the coming of our LORD

"JESUS? Nothing at all. The World "grew worſe rather than better, under "all theſe polite Helps to Piety and Vir- "tue. And (*a*) *after that in the Wiſdom "of* GOD, *the World by Wiſdom knew not "*GOD, *it pleaſed* GOD, *by the Fooliſhneſs "of Preaching, to ſave them that believe.* "And all thoſe that know that true and "godly Reformation begins at the Heart, "touched with the Grace of GOD, will "never ſeek Help from ſuch Strollers as "this World generally affords." In Oppoſition to which you ſay, "That the Syſ- "tem of Chriſtianity is abſolutely perfect, "but the particular Precepts muſt be ex- "plained and enforced to our *ſqueamiſh "Minds*, and that too, frequently and va- "rioufly, ſometimes warmly, and other- "times in cool Blood, now with a grave, "and now with a ſmilling Countenance." By this, *Sir*, you muſt conclude the Neceſſity of Stage-Plays, as a Chriſtian Means of reformin g the World, or you ſay nothing to the Purpoſe. I did not think that my Words could have offended any judicious Chriſtian. I ſay, "For the Recommen- "dation of Virtue, the GOSPEL doth not "*want* the Aſſiſtance of the Stage." And I believe

(*a*) 1 Cor i. 21.

believe you are the firſt Chriſtian that ever ſaid that it doth. When I ſay the Gospel, I do not exclude Gospel Means and Ordinances. So far from that, I mention one of them, which the Apoſtle calls the *Fooliſhneſs of Preaching*. I appeal to Hiſtory and Experience, for the Inſufficiency of the Stage, and all other human Methods for the Reformation of the World, and the Amendment of Men. I might be pretty large on this Particular, having not long ago preached upon 1 *Cor.* i. 21. But perhaps that were to prevent my ſelf from doing it to another Purpoſe. Muſt your theatrical Scheme in the Clouds ecclipſe the Glory of the Gospel, as the only Method of turning Men from *Darkneſs* to *Light*, and from their Sins to God? Peruſe your *Catechiſm*, and ſee if Stage Plays are among the ordinary Means whereby Christ communicateth to us the Benefits of his Mediation and Redemption. Peruſe your *Bible*, and ſee if theatrical Performances, or any other particular Diverſion whatever, is recommended to us as a Means of reforming Mankind. You are very far out in ſaying, " That if a well regulated Stage " is to be baniſhed as ſuperfluous, and even

" ſinful (as implying an Imperfection in the " Scripture) you can ſee no way to ſave " moral Converſations, Eſſays and Ser- " mons, which all muſt be given up, in " Conſequence of the ſame Principles." There are no Means *wanting* for our Inſtruction and our Growth in Grace, but what are mentioned and recommended in the *Holy Scriptures*. And if you plead for the Neceſſity of Stage-Plays, then you, not I, make the *Scriptures* imperfect. For whatever we *want* as a Means of Reformation, is neceſſary in order to it. Reading the *Holy Scriptures*, hearing and preaching the Word of GOD, Prayer, Praiſe, Meditation, Chriſtian Converſation, and the Sacraments of the *New Teſtament*, are all of them Means of Salvation of a Scriptural Authority. And becauſe Stage-Plays are not mentioned among them, you muſt not make them equally neceſſary and ſubſervient to us as we are Men and Chriſtians. But, *Sir*, you exceed your ſelf, when you pretend that the Stage is a neceſſary Means of inforcing the Precepts of the GOSPEL upon our *Squeamiſh Minds*. What is this? For the Sake of our *Squeamiſh Minds*, muſt the Things of GOD, and thoſe that tend

" to

to the Reformation and Salvation of Mankind, be burleſqued and acted upon a Theatre, either for our Diverſion or pretended Inſtruction? O fy, *Sir*, I am heartily ſorry you ſhould talk ſo profanely upon ſo important a Subject. I did think and ſay, "That all thoſe who know that true and "godly Reformation begins at the Heart, "touched with the Grace of GOD, will ne-"ver ſeek Help from ſuch Strollers as this "World generally affords;" nor call upon them with O's and Exclamations to declaim for Virtue and againſt Vice and Immorality. Do the *Holy Apoſtles*, the firſt Preachers of the GOSPEL, demean themſelves and their ſerious Subject to accommodate their Inſtructions and Exhortations to the *Squeamiſh Minds* of the Hearers? Do they any where laugh and jeſt and divert themſelves with the Things of Salvation? Do they cloath the Doctrines of the GOSPEL with light and luſory or ludicrous Expreſſions? Do they make a *Play* of preaching Repentance and Salvation? No: they in good earneſt go directly to the Bottom of the Diſeaſe, and plainly, gravely and ſeriouſly hold forth the Remedy. Were I ſure that you have the Honour of

preaching

preaching the GOSPEL, I ſhould conclude, that your Sermons were modelled upon Plays, more than upon the *Holy Bible*. The Apoſtles and Primitive Preachers were neither *Mountebanks*, nor *Merry Andrews*, nor *Tragedians*. But it is my Comfort that your *theatrical Method* of reforming the World, and preaching the GOSPEL, is a Secret the chriſtian World never knew before. No wonder, for there is not the leaſt Veſtige of it to be found upon ſacred Record.

BUT if you was for an extraſcriptural *ſuccedaneum*, you have very unluckily pitcht upon the Theatre as a collateral Means of Salvation. Much do you differ from the young pious *Prince of Conti*. He ſays, "It "is true that the Deſign of Plays is to "move the Paſſions, as thoſe who have "treated of *Poeticks* do agree: And on "the contrary the Deſign of Chriſtianity is "to calm, to weaken and to deſtroy them, "as much as is poſſible in this Life. 'Tis "therefore that the *Scripture* teacheth us "that the Life of Man upon Earth is a "continual Combat.——The Fleſh makes "a cruel War againſt the Spirit, which "cannot live but by mortifying the Luſts

"of

" of the Fleſh.——And as Examples have " a great Power over Men, at the ſame " Time, the Stage propoſes to us its Heroes " abandon'd to their Paſſions, Religion pro- " poſes to us JESUS CHRIST ſuffering to de- " liver us from our Paſſions. Thoſe who " run after the firſt Look upon CHRIST " *crucified* as *Fooliſhneſs* and an Occaſion " of Scandal. But thoſe whom he calls to " the Participation of his Glory, by deny- " ing and renouncing their luſtful Deſires, " look on him as the *Power of God and* " *the Wiſdom of God.*" That Prince knew as well as you, what is pleaded for the Stage. He was as well acquainted with Plays as moſt Men. For he kept, in the Days of his Vanity, a Company of Come- dians in his Family. He allows that it is ſaid that " Plays are a Repreſentation of " Vices as well as Virtues, becauſe a juſt " Picture muſt repreſent its Model ſuch as " it is, and that the Actions of Men be- " ing mingled with Good and Evil, it is " by Conſequence the Duty of a dramatick " Poem to repreſent them in that Manner; " But this is ſo far from having any ill " Effect, that it is quite the contrary. I " cannot, ſaith he, better ſhew the Weak-

" neſs

" neſs of this Objection, than by anſwer-
" ing that the Remedy is worſe than the
" Diſeaſe. Such is the Corruption of the
" Heart of Man; But ſuch likewiſe is that
" of the Poet, who after having ſhed his
" Venom thro' the whole Piece, in a delicate
" and agreeable Manner, ſuited to our Nature
" and Conſtitution, thinks to be quit for
" ſome moral Diſcourſe put unto the Mouth
" of an old King, who is commonly repre-
" ſented by a very ill Actor, whoſe Part
" is diſagreeable, the Verſes dry and lan-
" guiſhing, and often bad, but always ne-
" gligent at leaſt." And upon Suppoſition that the Theatre is reformed, that it admits nothing but what is chaſte, and that the Paſſions are repreſented in the moſt decent Manner imaginable (which is as much as your Standard of Reformation amounts to). He ſays, " I yet maintain it is not the leſs
" contrary to the Chriſtian Religion: And
" I dare even affirm, that this Appearance
" of Decency and the Retrenchment of
" immodeſt Things, renders it much the
" more dangerous. None but *Libertines*
" could ſee indecent Pieces; the Women
" of Quality and Virtue would have a Hor-

" rcr

'ror of them: Whereas the preſent State 'of Plays (that is *French* Plays which are "much more decent than the *Engliſh*), "doing no Violence to the Modeſty natu-"ral to the Sex, they do not defend them-"ſelves from a Poiſon, more ſecret and e-"qually dangerous with the other." And tho' you think the Stage might be of ſingular Uſe to Religion, he is of Opinion, "That God hath not choſen the Theatre "as the Place upon which to make the "Glory of his Saints and Martyrs to ſhine, "or to give Inſtruction to thoſe whom he "calls to the Participation of his Heritage." And whatever may be done hereafter by the Theatre, it is his Opinion that No-body thinks of it as a warm Incentive to Virtue and a powerful Preſervative againſt Vice, when he ſays, "That it is very pro-"bable that no Body ever thought of pre-"paring themſelves to ſee a Play, by Prayer, "ſince the Spirit of God would much ſooner "lead one to ſhun this dangerous Diverſi-"on, than to ask his Grace to be preſerv-"ed from the Corruption which is there "met with." The Stage he thinks would be a very imperfect Means of propagating

the Gospel, " Because the greatest Part of " Christian Virtues are incapable of apearing " upon it. Silence, Patience, Moderation, " Divine Wisdom, Poverty of Spirit, and Re- " pentance or Penitence, are not Virtues, the " Representation of which can divert Specta- " tors, and especially one never hears any " mention of Humility and bearing of Injuries. " What a poor Hero of a Play would an " humble and patient and religious Person " make? There must be something great and " elevated in the Esteem of Men, or at least " something lively and animated, which is " not to be met with in the Christian " Wisdom and Gravity. And therefore " those who have introduced any Saints on " the Stage, have been forced to make them " appear proud, and to put Words in their " Mouths fitter for the Heroes of ancient " *Rome*, than for Saints and Martyrs. The " Devotion too of these Stage-saints must be " always a little gallant."

Let your Mind be ever so *squeamish*, I cannot think the Theatre a proper Vehicle to convey saving Knowledge to it. Sir, *Squeamishness* is not to be humoured; and let me help you with a Vomit. Mr. *Richard Baxter*,

Baxter, ſays (*a*), "God hath appointed a "ſtated Means of inſtructing Souls, by Pa- "rents, Miniſters, *&c.* which is much more "fit and powerful than Stage-plays. And "it is doubtful whether Play-houſes be not "a ſtated Means of Man's Inſtitution, ſet "up to the ſame pretended Uſe as the "Church and Miniſtry of Christ, and ſo "be not againſt the ſecond Commandment. "For my Part, I cannot defend them, if "any ſhall ſay that the Devil hath apiſhly "made theſe his Churches in Competition "with the Churches of Christ." Thus, what you imagine, tends to recommend Stage-plays, is, in the Opinion of others, the ſtrongeſt Objection againſt them. One of the Reverend Miniſters of this City being told by a Gentleman, that our *Strollers* would be Aſſiſtants to the Miniſters in recommending Virtue and rediculing Vice, anſwered very well, That he did not like ſuch Collegues: Nor ſhould I be very forward to give them the Right Hand of Fellowſhip, as Brethren in Vocation. And tho' our Judges have declared Stage-plays a lawful Diverſion, yet I do not believe, they will grant Comedians a Licence to

(*a*) Chriſtian Directory Page 688. Edit. 1707.

preach the GOSPEL in their ſublime dramatical Way, or to *play* with the Things of GOD and Salvation. You have an unmeaſurable Conceit of your own projective Talent, to fancy that Stage-plays, hitherto ſo inconſiſtent with Chriſtianity, may be made *of ſingular Uſe to Religion.*

I have ſaid (*a*), "That the Sins of the "World call for Rivers of Tears and not "for Laughter. It is a poor Sport to make "merry with your own or the Sins and "Miſeries of others. *The bleſſed Man doth* "*not ſtand in the Way of Sinners, nor* "*doth he ſit in the Seat of the Scornful.* "But *Fools make a Mock at Sin.* Mr. "*Filmer* acknowledges that no Vice but "ſuch as the Audience may ſafely laugh "at, ought to be brought into a Comedy. "And ſince all Vices are Sins, none at all "ought to be brought upon the Stage, "*for our Diverſion.*" You perſuade yourſelf, *Sir*, that I have been miſled by the Ambiguity of Words. But if I am miſled, I am not ſingular in the Miſtake. Mr. *Baxter*, in his firſt of his fifteen Reaſons againſt the Stage, ſays, "Players per-

"ſonate

(*b*) Page 59.

" ſonate vices commonly vitiouſly, that is, " without Need, reciting ſinful Words, " and repreſenting ſinful Actions, which " as they were evil in the firſt com- " mitting, ſo are they in the needleſs " Repetition. *Eph.* v. 3, 4, 12. *But For-* " *nication and all Uncleanneſs, or Covetouſ-* " *neſs* (or Luſt) *let it not be once named* " *among you, as becometh Saints: Neither* " *Filthineſs, nor fooliſh Talking nor Jeſt-* " *ing which are not convenient; but rather* " *giving of Thanks.----For it is a Shame* " *even to ſpeak of theſe Things which are done* " *of them in ſecret.* And becauſe they are " ſpoken and acted commonly without that " Shame and Hatred and Grief which ſhould " rightly affect the Hearers with an Abho- " rence of them; and therefore tend to re- " concile Men to Sin, and to tempt them " to take it for a Matter of Sport." And having this great Man's Authority on my Side, I am the leſs ſenſible of being miſled by the Ambiguity of Words. Many Errors ariſe from not diſtinguiſhing enough, and ſeveral from diſtinguiſhing too much. You allow that none but Fools would think the univerſal Sinfulneſs of the World, a Subject for Laughter. But when you come to Parti-

culars,

culars, you justify that foolish and wicked Practice. For if I am made to laugh at one, and laugh at another, and laugh at all Sins in their Turn, what is this, but to make the Sinfulness of the World a Subject of Laughter and Diversion? Adultery is a Sin, and for which we should always be sorry, and which, when it is the Subject of our Thoughts and Discourse, should always affect us with Grief. It is an Affront put upon our great God and Lawgiver, our *heavenly Father* and our dear *Lord* and *Redeemer*. It is likewise a dangerous, if not a mortal Wound given to poor Spirits, which are of great Value in the Account of God. And yet the Criminal and Soul-sick Wife and Gallant, and the injured Husband are dressed up in such ridiculous Colours, as to make them the Subject of the Sport and Laughter of the Audience for several Hours together. Sure you could not find in your Heart to make merry with any Thing offensive to an earthly Parent, or ruinous or hurtful to a Friend. But while you take your Diversion with the Sins of Men, your God and your Neighbour's Soul, are not in all your Thoughts. Some that defend the

Stage

Stage do ſay, That *Vice muſt firſt put on the Livery of a Fool before it can be ridiculed.* And Mr. *Filmer*, I told you, was ſo ſenſible of the Sin of making merry with Vice and Wickedneſs, that he ſays no Vice ought to be brought into a Comedy, but ſuch as the Audience may ſafely laugh at. And, I ſay, the more of the Fool any Vice is made to wear, the leſs of the Criminal appears about it. Crimes can make none, but mad Men laugh. And whenever we happen to make our ſelves merry with them, they then appear to us only as ſimple and unſinful Follies. Their natural Horror muſt be laid aſide, or covered over with the Livery of Folly. And what Right have we as Chriſtians to diſguiſe our own Sins, or the Sins of others, to take away any Part of their hideous Deformity, for our Diverſion? Doth not this, as Mr. *Baxter* ſays, tend to reconcile Men to Sin, and to tempt them to take it for a Matter of Sport. Allow me to give you the *Prince* of *Conti*'s Thought upon this. I quote him oft, but I hope much to the Purpoſe. His Words are thus tranſlated, (*a*) "The "Pleaſure of Plays is an evil Pleaſure, "be-

(*a*) Second Treatiſe againſt Plays, S 12.

" becauſe it commonly ſprings only from
" a Source of Corruption, which is ex-
" cited in us by what we there ſee; and
" to be convinced of this, one needs only
" conſider that when we have an extream
" Horrour of an Action, we take no Plea-
" ſure in ſeeing it repreſented: This is
" what obliges the Poets to conceal from
" the Eyes of the Spectators all that may
" give them that diſagreeable Horrour.
" When we do not feel then the ſame
" Averſion for the fooliſh Paſſions and
" thoſe other Irregularities which are re-
" preſented in Plays, and that we take
" Pleaſure in beholding them, 'tis a Sign
" that we do not hate them, and that they
" excite in us, I know not what, Incli-
" nation for thoſe Vices which ſpring from
" the Corruption of our Hearts. If we
" had an Idea of Vice according to its na-
" tural Deformity, we could not bear the
" Image of it: And therefore one of the
" greateſt Poets of this Age (*a*) obſerves,
" that one of his beſt Pieces was not agree-
" able to the Stage, becauſe it ſtruck the
" Minds of the Spectators with the hor-
" rible Idea of a Proſtitution, to which a holy
" Mar-

(*a*) Corneille.

" Martyr had been condemned. But that " which he draws from thence for the " Juſtification of Plays, which is, that the " Theatre is now ſo chaſt, that indecent " Objects cannot be ſuffered there, is that " which manifeſtly condemns them. For " one may learn by this Example, that we " approve in ſome Manner of all that we " ſuffer, and which we ſee with Pleaſure " on the Stage, ſince we cannot ſuffer what " we have in Horror. And by Conſe- " quence, there being ſtill ſo much Cor- " ruption and vitious Paſſions in thoſe " Plays which ſeem the moſt innocent, it " is a Sign we do not hate thoſe Irregu- " larities, ſince we take Pleaſure in ſee- " ing them repreſented." The Paſſion appears without Shame and without Infamy, and the Audience glories in being touched with it: Thus, the Mind by little and little, grows familiar with it; we learn to ſuffer it, and to ſpeak of it, and then the Soul lets itſelf gently ſlide into it, following the Bent of Nature. Of this I can afford you a poetical Deſcription (*b*).

(*b*) Eſſay on Man, Epiſt. II. lin. 201.

Vice is a Monſter of ſo frightful Mein,
As to be hated, needs but to be ſeen;
But ſeen too oft, familiar with her Face
We firſt endure, then pity, then embrace.

THERE is nothing more dangerous to Virtue than that which takes off the Horror of Sin, and deſtroys that which reſtrains Men from committing it; And this nothing can do more effectually than to turn our Crimes into Sport and Diverſion.

YOU ſay, *Sir*, "It cannot be denied "that Faults *may poſſibly* be baniſhed mere"ly by the Force of *Ridicule.*" You lay ſuch a Streſs upon *poſſibly*, that I may well imagine that this is one of your Poſſibilities which are *next to impoſſible.* And if this could *poſſibly* happen, it would be no better than baniſhing one Fault with another, or making many Faults in mending one. I acknowledge that Men may be mocked out of little ſinleſs Follies. Mr. *Rich* can baniſh or reduce a Wig-bag to a moderate Seize, or may make a Reduction of a few Patches. He can take an Oaken Stick out of a Gentleman's Hand,

and

and Jocky-belt from his Waſte, tho' he were a Judge of the Nation, and make him put on his own Cloaths inſtead of his Footman's. But I can never perſuade my ſelf that a Play-houſe Performance can take away one ſingle Sin out of the Heart of Man. Did I not tell you, that true and and godly Reformation begins at the Heart touched with the Grace of God. And can you, without Jeſting now, expect that God will ſo bleſs your ſporting with Sin, as to make that very Diverſion a Means of any Man's Converſion? Alas! *Dear Sir*, you little conſider what a Hold our Sins have of us, when you imagine that it is ſo eaſy a Thing to get free from them. When did you ever ſee an Oppreſſor jeſted out of his Plunder? Will a *well bred Affront* or a witty Saying, purify the Heart and change the Inclinations of an unclean Perſon? If this were a proper Method of reforming the World, and reducing Sinners to Repentance and the Obedience of the Juſt, it is ſomething very ſurpriſing, that the Inhabitants of the Play-houſe are not better reformed. They dwell in Sports and Plays, and live by Ridicule, and never mend their Manners. Their

beſt Cuſtomers too, are not always the moſt regular and religious People of the Nation.

Of late there hath a ſtrange Notion prevail'd with the gay and unthinking Part of Mankind, concerning the great Advantages of *Ridicule*. Some are for making it a Standard of Truth, and the Teſt of every Thing truly great and noble. In their grave and ſolid Judgment, what can bear it muſt be true, and what can be made ridiculous muſt be falſe. The *Superſtition* and *Enthuſiaſm* of the World, they maintain, is owing to the Solemnity and Seriouſneſs with which Religion is treated: And are ready to lament the Folly and ill Policy of the Heathens, who did not rather chooſe to expoſe and ridicule the Chriſtian Religion upon the Stage, than to write againſt it, or to perſecute to Death thoſe who profeſſed it. They are therefore for trying the Truth of every Thing, and of our *holy Faith* among the reſt, by *Ridicule*. But, with their Leave, I think it doth not ſhew much of the *Politeſſe d' Eſprit*, to ſet forth a Trifle in a ſerious and important Manner, nor to diſplay a ſolemn and weighty

Mat-

Matter in a ridiculous and trifling Manner. It is true Eloquence to manage our Subject with ſuitable Words, and to make our Expreſſions keep a Proportion to the Matter, whether it be light or weighty. If it is one of the favourable Prejudices upon which Men's erroneous Opinions in religious Matters are founded, to talk of them in a grave and ſerious Manner; it is what cannot be helped. For I can no more hinder my ſelf from being grave and ſerious, when I ſpeak of ſerious Things, than I can hinder my ſelf from laughing at a good Jeſt. To make us change Stiles, is an unjuſt and an impracticable Project. It is impracticable, becauſe none but a Fool will ridicule ſerious Matters. And tho' it could take Place, it would be unjuſt, becauſe a ſerious Matter ought to be ſeriouſly handled. For Inſtance, to burleſque Religion in order to try its Truth, were to put the Prejudice againſt it; whereas to judge impartially we muſt put every Thing in its own and not in a borrowed Light. We know it is a common Method to ſet Men firſt a Laughing, in order to impoſe upon their Underſtanding. And therefore my Lord *Veralam* juſtly reckons all merry and jo-

coſe

coſe Men very dangerous Counſellers of State. *Sir*, if you are not in Jeſt when you pretend to reform the World, and to turn Men from their Sins unto GOD, don't think upon *Ridicule* as a proper and effectual Means. For if ever it hath any Force to make Men forbear ſome outward Sins, it is not becauſe they are Sins offenſive to GOD and hurtful to Souls, but as they are ſinleſs Follies. Ridicule can only expoſe them as ſuch, and only as ſuch can it correct them; for the Effect always follows the Nature of the Cauſe.

To ſhew the Succeſs of *Ridicule*, you think fit to mention the Rebuke given by *Elijah* to the Prieſts of *Baal*, who mocked them, and ſaid, 1 *Kings* xviii. 27. *Cry aloud; for he is a God, either he is a talking, or he is purſuing, or he is on a Journey, or peradventure he ſleepeth and muſt be awaked.* If you read the Context, you will ſee, that this was without Succeſs: For the Prieſts of *Baal* continued in their Idolatry, and ſuffered Death for it; and the People was convinced that the GOD of *Iſrael* was the only true GOD, when *Elijah*'s Sacrifice was miraculouſly conſumed with

with Fire from Heaven. But if you have adduced this Paſſage to juſtify Men's making Sport and Diverſion with Sin, I do think you have miſſed your Mark. I admit there are *Ironies* and *Sarcaſms* in the *Bible*, and that this Paſſage is one of them. Our *bleſſed* Saviour, *Matth.* vi. 7. ſays, *But when ye pray, uſe not vain Repetitions as the Heathens do; for they think that they ſhall be heard for their much ſpeaking.* And ſo the Prieſts of *Baal* called upon the Name of *Baal*, from Morning even untill Noon, ſaying, *O Baal hear us.* And this they repeated over and over. They expected to be heard for the Labour of their Lungs. Their Idolatry was groſs, and their Manner of Worſhip was abſurd. The Prophet's Words are a ſtrong and a ſharp Argument againſt both. He reaſons with them, as you ſay, *ab abſurdo.* No more I believe you intend to make of his Argument. Sure you cannot ſay, that the Prophet diverts himſelf with their Idolatry. If he did, we may ſafely renounce his Example as our Rule in Morals. And is there not a very great Difference betwixt a ſtrong Argument, or a ſharp Rebuke uſed againſt Sin, and making a Sport and Diverſion of our own, or

other

other Mens Sins? I allow of Arguments *ab abſurdo*, and I allow them to be ſtrictly concluſive too. And though they are not ſo direct Proofs as Arguments and Demonſtration *a priori*, we need not fall out about our *Logicks*. But then, I hope, in Return, you will allow, that ſuch Arguments are not a Subject of Laughter, or a Provocation to it. If you'll peruſe but *Euclid's Elements*, either by *Barrow*, or by *des Chales*, you ſhall find ſeveral Demonſtrations concluding *Q. E. A. which is abſurd.* And, though perhaps I am as little Proof againſt a Jeſt as ſome other Men, yet I muſt confeſs I never laughed at any of them. I cannot judge of you by myſelf; for I have known ſome People laugh at holding up a Finger. But, *Sir*, can you ſeriouſly think, that a Man who goes to the Play-houſe for his Diverſion, (and not one of a thouſand go to that Place with a more commendable Deſign) can keep his Character as a Chriſtian in laughing at all the Crimes which are there burleſqued, and are made the Subject of Sport for the Audience? The very beſt that can be ſaid for him, is, that he is ſo well diverted with the Play, and laughs ſo heartily at what he ſees and hears,

that

that he forgets that *Sin* is the Subject: And thus, for the Sake of a Jeſt, he doth not think that it is a Sin, or he thinks the more lightly of it, and is thereby inured to think as little of Vice out of a Play-houſe as in it.

You allow, that the Diſtemper of Sin calls for our Sorrow, and *Rivers of Tears*; but you add, that *Oceans of Tears can have no Influence as to the Remedy.* And you think it a more proper Method to ſet Men a laughing to *burſt the Abſceſs* of Wickedneſs in their Breaſts, than to induce them to mourn and weep for it. Sure you cannot mean, to ſet a Man a laughing at his own Sins, in order to lead him to Repentance; for that would be a *tragi-comical* Kind of Contrition. And for your laughing at the Sins of other Men, it is ſtill, in my Opinion, to fall under the Character of *Solomon*'s Fool, who *makes a Mock at Sin.* It can have no good Effect upon you, and as little upon them. Neither you nor they, by Means of Mirth and Diverſion, ſhall ever be induced to love your Sins, *as Sins*, the leſs. But how you come to ſay, that *Oceans of Tears* can have

no Influence as to the Remedy of Sin, I cannot imagine. You and I believe, that it is only for the Merits of the LORD JESUS CHRIST that our Sins are pardoned; and that he *hath given himſelf for us, to redeem us from all Iniquity, and purify unto himſelf a peculiar People, zealous of good Works* (*a*). I hope you'll admit, that Repentance is a Mean, and an abſolutely neceſſary Pre-requiſite to Pardon of Sins and Amendment of Life. And how then hath it come into your Head, and how hath it come out of it, to ſay, that Tears have no Influence as to the Remedy of Sin? Are not Tears of Repentance a proper Means of putting away Sin? We are commanded to mourn for our own, and to mourn for the Sins of others. It is a Duty both of natural and revealed Religion, and it is ſomething like Profaneneſs, to prefer *Redicule* as the more apt and powerful Means of the Reformation and Salvation of Mankind. It will be for your Honour to retract this as an Inadvertancy, as I hope you will all that you have ſaid in Favour of the Stage, and believe, for the Reaſons that I have given, that it is in itſelf a ſinful Diverſion,

(*a*) Tit. ii. 14.

verſion, and is prohibited in the *holy Scriptures.*

YOUR Concluſion is, *The Stage not being in itſelf ſinful, we are not to wreſt Scripture to prove an abſolute Prohibition of it.* I do not take this for an *Innuendo* that I wreſt Scripture induſtriouſly from an Averſion conceived againſt the Stage. I am obliged to believe you have a better Opinion of me. Men get Notions of Things ſometimes by *Reaſoning*, and ſometimes by *Inclinations.* I was a very young Man when I firſt took up my Opinion of the Sinfulneſs of the Stage. It was not from the Remarks that I had made upon Plays, Actors, and the ill Conſequences of theatrical Aſſemblies. I had no Prejudice againſt Stage-plays more than againſt any other Diverſion, though even then, I am ſorry, I had ſeen ſome in *Britain* and abroad. It was only by peruſing my *Bible* that I had formed a Judgment againſt them as an unchriſtian Diverſion. I own I had not great Strugglings with myſelf to look upon them as ſuch; ſeeing, at beſt, they were only a Diverſion, which a good Chriſtian, upon the leaſt Suſpicion of its Unlawfulneſs ought

to forbear. From ſuch a Beginning my Reaſons againſt the Stage have grown to the Pitch you now ſee them at. And, *Sir*, if you would but ſeriouſly conſider what we are contending about, with the ſame Spirit and Impartiality that I have done, I am almoſt perſuaded, that at laſt you would be of my Mind: For obſerve,

1. It is a very hard Matter to explain a Text of Scripture to Demonſtration, eſpecially when there are but a few to the ſame Purpoſe. Nor is it neceſſary that all the Articles of our revealed Religion ſhould be ſo many Truths of the ſame Evidence with this, *All the Angles of a Triangle are equal to two right.* GOD, if he thought it proper, could eaſily convince the moſt obſtinate Minds, and ſet every Truth of the GOSPEL in a Light ſtrong enough to force away all Prejudices from before it, as the Sun diſpels Darkneſs. But in ſuch a forced and violent Conviction on our Part, there would be nothing virtuous or commendable. GOD will have ſomething Praiſe-worthy and rewardable, even in our Faith and Aſſent to the Doctrines of Revelation. The Aſſent to ſuch Things is an Action of the Mind, where-

wherein Candor and Ingenuity have as conſiderable a Part as Clearneſs of Underſtanding and Strength of Judgment.

II. In judging of the Meaning of any Text of Scripture, Regard muſt always be had to the Nature and Importance of the Thing ſuppoſed to be or not to be revealed: Therefore when the Law ſeems to point againſt any Duty of *natural Religion*, I do not think that all the Learning, Language and Criticiſm in the World, could convince me, that with ſuch a Face, and in ſuch a Senſe, it was of divine Inſtitution. And if *Abraham* had had no ſtronger Proof of GOD's Command to ſacrifice his Son than a Text of Scripture, I cannot think but he might have uſed twenty honeſt and commendable Shifts to have evaded ſuch a Senſe of it. And,

III. When any Thing appears to be a divine Command, which obliges me to expoſe my Life or Health to great Danger, and which puts me into great Troubles and Inconveniencies, and Difficulties, and which takes from me a great Part of my worldly Subſtance, my GOD allows me to exa-

mine

mine the Matter narrowly, and to ſatisfy myſelf of the Meaning and Spirit of the Law, before I ſubmit to it as a Rule of my Life. But,

IV. When the Thing ſuppoſed to be or not to be prohibited or commanded, is in itſelf indifferent, and the doing or omitting it doth neither hurt nor help me much, when it doth not wrong me in my Health, my Reputation, or in any of the real Comforts and Conveniencies of Life, I freely acknowlege, that I make very little Difficulty to admit any probable Senſe to make it a Matter of Command or Prohibition. The Nature of the *Thing* doth not want the greateſt Degree of textual Evidence; and it is want of Candor and Ingenuity that makes us require it.

The Application of theſe Rules to the Caſe before us, is obvious. The Queſtion betwixt you and me is, Whether the Diverſion of the Stage is forbidden in the Goſpel? I ſuppoſe, *Sir*, you are neither Actor nor Undertaker. You can ſuſtain no Loſs of Health, Eſtate or Reputation, in not attending Stage-plays. The utmoſt Inconveniency

niency that can happen upon your Abſence from thoſe dramatical Occaſions and Entertainments, is but to croſs a childiſh and fond Inclination to one particular Sport. And muſt no leſs be ſufficient to prevail upon your Forbearance than the higheſt Evidence of a ſcriptural Prohibition? Nay, *Sir*, if this is the Caſe with you, allow me to ſay, that you act an unmanly, unreaſonable, and ſinful Part. It is your Buſineſs, as a Chriſtian, to be ſure that your Diverſions are all lawful. Not only a *Probability*, but likewiſe a bare *Poſſibility* of their Unlawfulneſs, ſhould hinder you from taking your Pleaſure in them. It is not ſo much the Buſineſs of Miniſters to *demonſtrate* the Unlawfulneſs of Stage-plays, as it is yours to abſtain from them until you have ſatisfied yourſelf that they are altogether allowed in the GOSPEL. The Reaſons that I have given you, and all that hath been brought againſt the Stage as an *unchriſtian Diverſion*, are ſo many *ſuperabounding* Arguments to diſſuade you from it. And now let me put this Queſtion to you, or rather, *dear Sir*, put it home to your own Conſcience, Whether, for a Frolick, you would venture Twenty Pound upon

on no better Security than you have for believing, that your Reaſons for the Stage are better than mine againſt it. And if in ſuch a Caſe you think your Money would be unſafe, were an equitable and diſcerning Judge to determine, then conſider the Danger of your Soul. And let me earneſtly beſeech you, as my Brother in the LORD JESUS CHRIST, don't, for a Frolick, break through a Law of his. He is our dear and amiable *Redeemer*, and let us love and fear and honour him, and keep at a Diſtance from every Thing that hath but an Appearance of Diſobedience to his holy Commandments. Pray, expoſe not yourſelf, I may ſay for nothing, to his ſovereign and ſore Diſpleaſure. It is not whether you or I can talk moſt or beſt upon the Subject, but which of us acts the moſt Chriſtian, reaſonable, innocent, inoffenſive, and prudent Part, with Reſpect to the Diverſion of the Stage, that will be determined in the *great Day* of the LORD. In a dying Hour, I am ſure a Review of the Time ſpent in theatrical Entertainments, will afford you no great Comfort: And it may, for all that you think of it now, be the Grief

and Vexation of your poor departing Spirit.

Sir, tho' you have not, I know others have made an Objection againſt my Explication of thoſe Paſſages of Scripture that I inſiſt upon as a divine Prohibition of Stage-plays, that is, that none of the *Fathers*, whether *Latin* or *Greek*, who wrote againſt the Stage, have made Uſe of them the ſame Way that I do; tho' they muſt have been better acquainted with the Heathen Stage, and with the Genius and Nature of the Language than I or any Man can pretend to be, at this Diſtance of Time. In anſwer to this, I own, I do not find that they did, but to be poſitive that they did not uſe and explain theſe Texts, as I have done, would require a Review of all their Works. But I am afraid there is more of *Shift* than Sincerity in this Objection. For did the Defenders of the Stage put any Value upon the Authority of theſe *Fathers* of the Church, they would diſpute the Lawfulneſs and Chriſtianity of theatrical Entertainment no longer; For all of them, as Occaſion offer'd, condemn it. But if my Explication be juſt in itſelf, it is not the leſs

juſt and exact, only becauſe none of them have mentioned it. *Things* have been found out by Accident, that have eſcaped the Obſervation of many who had better Opportunities to have made the Diſcovery, and who had made it their Buſineſs to ſearch for it. And if there is any Strength in the Objection, as it is laid, all Men might deſpair of explaining the *Holy Scriptures* with any more Advantage than hath been done already. But I have not the Honour of being the firſt who hath explained in my Way, the two *Greek* Words, *Eutrapelia* and *Komos*, which, you think, I have miſtaken. And in all ſuch Matters it ſhall always be a greater Satisfaction to me, to have the Authority of Men of Learning and Judgment on my Side of the Queſtion, than to be the firſt that ever fell upon the Thought. Without ſurrendering our own private Judgment to that of our Superiors in Knowledge, a Concurrence of other Men's Opinions, hath a natural Tendency to confirm us in our own.

I did intend to have added ſome Authorities of Weight againſt the Stage. But, as

as I have been more extenſive already than I intended, I muſt forbear. And I can the more eaſily diſpenſe with them, becauſe they have been ſo laboriouſly and ſo copiouſly adduced by others who have wrote upon the Subject, that there is no Place left to me but that of a Tranſcriber; and becauſe Authorities are little regarded by the Protectors of the Theatre. All I ſhall ſay on this Head is, that the Stage firſt aroſe at *Athens*, that *Socrates*, the wiſeſt Man of the known Heathen World, declared againſt it, at leaſt *Comedy*. And good Reaſon he had; for by that he loſt his Life. *Plato*, another Citizen of *Athens*, did the ſame, and at laſt ſo did the whole *State*. And all this Time, I do not find that it reached any other Parts of *Greece*; at leaſt, for a long Time, it made no conſiderable Appearance any where elſe. From *Greece* it went to *Aſia* with the *Grecian* Monarchy. It came to *Rome* about the Time the *Romans* began to loſe their ancient Honour and Honeſty (*a*). *Their* great and wiſe Men condemned

(*a*) Græcia capta ferum victorem cepit, & artes
Intulit agreſti Latio.——
Serus enim Græcis admovit acumina chartis,
Et poſt Punica bella quietus quærere cœpit
Quid Sophocles & Theſpis & AEſchylus utile ferrent.
Horat.

it, as hurtful to good Manners and Morals, and ruinous even to so great and powerful a State. It was often suppressed by Heathen Emperors, the Actors were sometimes banished *Rome*, sometimes all *Italy*, and sometimes confined to hard Labour in Relegation. But for other Nations that maintain'd their Freedom against *Roman* Oppression, they knew nothing of it. And we are told by *Tacitus* that the *Germans*, in particular, were a wiser and more virtuous People than to laugh at Vice. The *Barbarians*, as the *Romans* and *Grecians* were pleased to call them, wanted to know if the *Romans* had Wives and Children, that they were forced to go to the Theatre for want of Diversion at home. We form an unjust Idea of the Heathen World, if we imagine that all the Nations of the Earth were as wicked as the *Greeks* and *Romans*. The Nation of the *Jews*, who of all the Earth were then only blessed with a Divine Revelation, had for a long Time no Theatres or Stage-plays among them; and when they got them, they were only attended by the Heathens that resided in their Country, and by the worst and wickedest of their own Nation; as both *Josephus* and *Philo Judæus* witness. And both these too, give it as their Opinion

nion that Stage-plays were inconſiſtent with their National Diſcipline. Chriſtian Fathers, Chriſtian Councils, and Chriſtian Emperors have largely and frequently declared againſt the Diverſion of the Theatre. The Popiſh and Proteſtant Churches unanimouſly diſcourage the Stage. The Proteſtants of *France*, once a Church conſiſting of Two thouſand one hundred and fifty Congregations, in ſeveral of which there were Three thouſand Communicants, *anno* 1571, in a *Synod* at *Rochel*, condemned all Comedies, Tragedies, Plays, Interludes. The Miniſters of the Gospel, in the *united Netherlands*, on all Occaſions give their Teſtimony againſt them. Great and learned Divines of our neighbouring Church of *England* have been and ſtill are of the ſame Opinion. Our own Church hath made it a Part of the Chriſtian Doctrine. Never was there any Thing more univerſally condemned as immoral and unchriſtian than the Diverſion of the Theatre. I muſt not omit our Brethren of the Presbyterian Perſuaſion in *England*. They, both Miniſters and People think Stage-plays ſinful and unlawful. He that wants Satisfaction in this Matter may conſult, among other Books,

Mr.

Mr. *Prynne's Hiſtrio-maſtix.* I pitch upon that Work the rather, becauſe the Author of the *Ancient and modern Stage ſurveyed*, allows him to be a fair Tranſcriber of Authorities. But becauſe I believe it may be of Uſe both with Reſpect to the Stage and other Diverſions, I ſhall give a Paſſage concerning them, out of Mr. *Baxter's Chriſtian Directory.* The Book is large, and, I believe, not in ſo many Hands as it well deſerves to be. He ſays (*a*), " All " theſe Things following are neceſſary to " the Lawfulneſs of a *Sport* or *Recrea-* " *tion*, and the Want of any of them will " *make* and *prove* it to be *unlawful.*"

' The End which you really intend in ' uſing it, muſt be to fit you for your Ser- ' vice to God, that is, either for your *Cal-* ' *lings* or for his *Worſhip*, or ſome Work of ' Obedience in which you may pleaſe and ' glorify him. 1 *Cor.* x. 31. *Whether ye eat* ' *or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the* ' *Glory of GOD.* 2. Therefore the Per- ' ſon that uſeth it muſt be one that is hear- ' tily devoted to God and his Service, and ' really loveth to do his Work and to pleaſe and

(*a*) Page 366

'and glorify him in the World: Which 'none but the Godly truly do. And there-'fore no carnal or ungodly Person, that 'hath no such holy End, can use any *Re-'creation* lawfully. For the End is essen-'tial to the moral Good of any Action: 'And an evil End must needs make it 'Evil.' *Tit* i. 5. *Unto the Pure all Things 'are pure*; (that is, all Things not forbid-'den,) *but unto them that are defiled and 'unbelieving is nothing pure, but even their 'Mind and Conscience is defiled. But must 'all wicked Men therefore forbear Recrea-'tions? Ans.* 1. Wicked Men are such as 'will not obey GOD's Law if they knew 'it; and therefore they inquire not what 'they should do with any Purpose sincerely 'to obey: But if they would obey, that 'which GOD commands them, is to for-'sake their Wickedness and become his 'Servants; and then there will be no room 'for the Question. 2. But if they will con-'tinue in a sinful and ungodly State, it is in 'vain to contrive how they may sport them-'selves without Sin. But we may tell them 'that if the Sport be *materially* lawful, it 'is not the *Matter* they are bound to for-'sake, but the sinful *End* and *Manner*:

And

'And till this be reformed, they cannot but 'ſin. 3. A lawful Recreation muſt be a 'Means fitly choſen and uſed to this End. 'If it hath not Aptitude to fit us for GOD's 'Service in our ordinary Callings and Duty, 'it can be to us no *lawful* Recreation. 'Tho' it be lawful to another that it is a 'Help to, it is unlawful to us. 4. There-'fore all Recreations are unlawful which 'are themſelves preferred before our Cal-'lings, or which are uſed by a Man that 'liveth idly and in no Calling, and hath 'no ordinary Work to make him need them. 'For theſe are not fit Means which exclude 'our End, inſtead of furthering it. 5. There-'fore all thoſe are unlawful Sports which 'are uſed only to delight a carnal Fantaſy, 'and have no higher End than to pleaſe 'the ſickly Mind that loveth them. 6. And 'therefore all thoſe are unlawful Sports 'which really unfit us for the Duties of our 'Callings and the Service of GOD: Which, 'laying the Benefit and Hurt together, do 'hinder us as much or more than they help 'us; which is the Caſe of all voluptuous 'Wantons. 7. All Diverſions are unlaw-'ful which take up any Part of the Time 'which we ſhould ſpend in greater Works:

Such

'Such are all thoſe that are unſeaſonable (as on the Lord's Day without Neceſſity, or when we ſhould be at Prayer or any other Duty). And all thoſe that take up more Time than the End of a Recreation doth neceſſarily require (which is too common). 8. If a Recreation be profane, as making Sport of *holy Things*, it is a mocking of God, and a Villany unbeſeeming any of his Creatures. 9. They are unlawful Diverſions which are uſed to the Wrong of others. As Plays that defame and reproach other Men, and hunting and hawking that treads down poor Men's Corn and Hedges. 10. It is ſinful to make Sport of other Mens ſinning, or to act it ourſelves, ſo as to become Partakers of it; which is too common with Comedians and other profane *Wits*. 11. Unclean, obſcene Recreations are unlawful when Filthineſs or Wantonneſs is repreſented without a due Expreſſion of its Odiouſneſs, or with obſcene Words and Actions. *Eph.* v. 3 4. 12. Thoſe Sports are unlawful which occaſion the multiplying of *idle* Words about them, and engage Players in fooliſh, needleſs and unprofitable Prating. 13. Thoſe Sports are ſinful

'which plainly tend to provoke ourſelves 'or others to ſin, as to Luſt, Swearing, 'Curſing, Railing, Fighting, or the like. '14. Thoſe alſo are unlawful which are the 'Exerciſe of Covetouſneſs to win other 'Mens Money, or tend to ſtir it up in 'thoſe we play with. 15. Cruel Recreati-'ons are unlawful, as taking Pleaſure in 'beholding *Duellers*, *Fighters*, or any that 'abuſe each other, or any other Creatures 'that needleſly torment each other. 16. 'Too coſtly Recreation alſo is unlawful: 'When you are but God's Stewards, and 'muſt be accountable to him for all you 'have; 'tis ſinful to expend it needleſly on 'Sports. 17. Unneceſſary Recreations for-'bidden by our lawful Governors are un-'lawful. If they were lawful before to 'thee, yet now they are not; becauſe 'your King, your Paſtor, your Parents, your 'Maſters have Power to rule and reſtrain 'you in ſuch Things; and you muſt obey 'them. 18. and *Laſtly*, If you have the 'Choice of divers Recreations before you, 'you muſt chuſe the fitteſt: And if you 'chuſe one that is leſs fit and profitable, 'when a fitter might be choſen, it is your 'Sin; tho' that which you chuſe were law-'ful, if you had no other.

To

To all these I add from the same pious and ~~accurate~~ Author, 19, That our Diversions acute
become to us unlawful when they give Offence to others, or tend to insnare them to Sin. "If ye are sure of yourselves that ye 'sin not in your Games and Sports, are you 'sure that your Companions do not, that 'they have no Lust or Vanity of Mind at 'Stage-plays. If you say *we are not bound 'to keep other Men from Sin*, I answer, you 'are bound to do your best towards it: 'And you are bound not to contribute willingly to their Sins, and to forbear a Thing 'indifferent to avoid the scandalizing and 'tempting another. If *Paul* would never 'eat Flesh while he lived rather than make 'a weak Brother offend, *Rom.* xiv. 21. 'should not your ~~Spirits~~ be subject to as Sports
'great Charity. He saith, 1 *Cor.* viii. 13. '*It is good neither to eat Flesh, nor to 'drink Wine, nor any Thing whereby the 'weak Brother stumbleth, or is offended, or 'made weak.* Obj. *Then we must give over 'our Meat, and Drink, and Cloaths and all.* '*Ans.* It followeth not that we must forsake our Duty to prevent another Man's 'Sin, because we must forsake our Pleasures

in Things indifferent. If you knew what Sin is, and what it is to ſave or loſe another Man's Soul, you would not make a Sport of other Mens Sins, or ſo eaſily contribute to their Damnation, and think your ſenſual Pleaſure a good Excuſe. In ſuch Caſes (*a*) *We that are ſtrong ought to bear the Infirmities of the Weak*, that is to compaſſionate them as we do Children in their Weakneſs, *and not to pleaſe ourſelves* to their Hurt; *Let every one of us pleaſe his Neighbour for his Good to Edification*, preferring the Edification of another's Soul before the Pleaſure of our Bodies; for even CHRIST *pleaſed not himſelf*. If CHRIST loſt his Life to ſave Men from Sin, will not you loſe your Sport for it? The higher any Man's Reputation is for Piety, Virtue and Knowledge, the more cautious he ought to be in his Conduct. And you, SIR, who make a Profeſſion of the *Holy Chriſtian Faith*, (and I hope you are ſincere in it) you who beſides, lay claim to more than ordinary Learning, you who take upon you to act the Part of a Divine, an Hiſtorian, a Linguiſt and Critick, and to underſtand the Subject of the *Stage* much better than other Men, unleſs you are ſure that

(*a*) Rom. xv. 1, 2, 3.

that thoſe who generally frequent Stage-plays are all of them of the ſame Mind with yourſelf, and can behave themſelves inoffenſively and innocently while they ſee and hear, you ought not to go there at all. Here, ſays one, a Man of Piety and profound Learning, and one who has ſtudied the Matter thoroughly, makes no Scruple to go to a Play-houſe, and why ſhould I be more ſcrupulous than he? This, you know, is an ill Way of Reaſoning; for your Knowledge and Conſcience can be no Rule for another Man's Conduct. He certainly ſins, and you give occaſion to it. In another Place my worthy Author Mr. *Baxter* hath one Reaſon more againſt the Stage which I cannot omit, that is, 20, "The beſt that "can be ſaid of Stage-plays, is, that they are "controverted and of doubtful Lawfulneſs: "And there are other Diverſions in Abun"dance of undoubted and uncontroverted "Lawfulneſs, for the ſame honeſt Ends and "Purpoſes: And it is therefore a Sin to do "that which is doubtful, without Need. "And ſure the Lawfulneſs of Stage-plays is "controverted with a Witneſs. It is not "ſome humourſome, moroſe and melan"choly Fanatick or Enthuſiaſt that hold the

Ne-

'*Negative*; but the whole primitive Church. 'You have againſt you, the Councils and 'Fathers, many antient Laws and Canons, 'many Papiſts, and theſe remarkable for 'their Learning and Sobriety; many Di-'vines of the Proteſtant Perſwaſion, and 'whole Churches, particularly the Church 'of which, I ſuppoſe you are a Member 'at leaſt. And will you hold to a Thing 'undoubtedly unneceſſary againſt the Judg-'ment of ſo many that account it ſinful?

By Mr. *Baxter*'s XVII. Qualification of a Diverſion, you are bound to obey them that watch and work for you in the Lord, in ſuch an indifferent Matter as a particular Diverſion. And your *Miniſters*, at leaſt all of them within this Presbytery, together with the *Ruling Elders*, have unanimouſly renewed their Remonſtrance againſt Stage-Plays. I know that many treat this as a contemptible way of Reaſoning, and are ſo much offended with an Advice or Admonition of their Paſtors, that they think it a Meanneſs of Spirit, a diſparaging their Underſtanding, and a Surrender of their Reaſon, and a Submiſſion to be ridden by *Prieſts* at their Pleaſure, to comply with it. It is not now as it hath been with

the

the World. When the Laity ſcarce had ſo much Learning as to be able to write their Names, the *Clergy* had a brave Occaſion to impoſe their Directions upon them. But now, they think themſelves capable to teach their Teachers. The *Laity*, I acknowledge are many of them well learned, but for ordinary their Learning doth not run much in the Religious Way. But for all their Learning in *Law* and *Phyſick* they are well enough diſpoſed to conſult with the *Doctor* when they are Sick, and with the Advocate when they have a Law Suit upon their Hands. A Concern for their Souls, equal to that for their Perſons and Eſtates, would diſpoſe them to conſult their Miniſters about what is Sin and what is Duty. And ſometimes they do, but it is juſt when they are going to take their Trial for a bleſſed or miſerable Eternity. When the Stage made its firſt Appearance in this City, the Miniſters oppoſed it in their Station as Miniſters, but not as Magiſtrates. A Gentleman, who I believe hath been oftner than once idly employed, wrote to the Author of *the Independent Whig* for his Aſſiſtance to ſupport the Play-houſe. That Author, knowing that it was to no purpoſe to defend the Lawfulneſs of the Stage, took

his

his usual Method to run down the Ministry of the Gospel; And as Nature hath bestowed upon him a great Stock of Rudeness, which he hath improved beyond many his Equals in an Aversion to all *Clergymen*, he returned an Answer full of Invectives against them, for Impertinence, incroaching and officiously meddling with every Thing. And tho' he knows very little of the Constitution of this Church and the Spirit of the Ministry, he treats both with the greatest Contempt. He is shallow in his Reasonings, but exceedingly Deep-mouthed in Scurrility and Railing. And tho' he himself is one of the worst bred Writers of the Age, he delights much in making his Remarks upon the breeding of others. When he writes to the World, he imagines he is teaching Boys in School, and scolding them for not Learning their Book. But whether the Ministers of this Church, in their Remonstrance against the Stage, have given him or his Correspondent here, an Occasion to libel the whole *Clergy* of the Christian World, I appeal to *the Admonition and Exhortation* of the Presbytery of *Edinburgh*, dated *November* 30. 1727.

The

'THE Presbytery taking to their Conſide-
'ration, that there is lately come to this City,
'a Company of Stage-players, who are ac-
'ting Plays within the Precincts of it, and
'have begun with acting one, which is fill'd
'with horrid Swearing, Obſcenity and Ex-
'preſſions of a double Meaning, tending di-
'rectly to corrupt the Minds of the Specta-
'tors and to the Practice of the groſſeſt Im-
'moralities; and there being good Reaſon
'from a printed Advertiſement of theirs
'handed about the Town, to expect that the
'Plays which they ſhall hereafter act will be
'of the like pernicious Tendency. And it
'being evident from long Experience, that
'it is in vain to expect any ſuch Reformation
'of the Stage as is conſiſtent with the *Chriſ-*
'*tian Life*: The Presbytery judge it their
'Duty, out of Concern for the Glory of GOD,
'the Intereſt of Religion, and the Good of
'the Souls committed to their Charge, plainly
'to declare their Sentiments, and to warn
'all within their Bounds of the Danger they
'incur by encouraging and frequenting theſe
'Plays. The Stage, as it hath been Mana-
'ged in all Ages of the Chriſtian World,
'hath been ever lookt upon by the Chriſtian

'Churches of all different Communions, as
'a *Seminary* of Impiety and Vice. Many
'Councils in the early and purer Ages of the
'Church, conſiſting of great Numbers of
'Members in different Parts of the Chriſtian
'World (whoſe Determinations are too
'large to be here particularly quoted, but
'may be ſeen in the Collections which have
'been made of them by the learned) have
'condemn'd all Actors of Stage-plays to Ex-
'communication, and diſcharged, under ſe-
'vere Cenſures, all Profeſſors of both Sexes of
'the Chriſtian Communion to be preſent at,
'or otherways to encourage Stage plays.
'The *larger Catechiſm* of the *Weſtminſter*
'*Aſſembly*, authoriſed by our own General
'Aſſemblies, publickly taught in this Church,
'does teach us that laſcivious Songs and
'Stageplays, are Sins forbidden in the Seventh
'Commandment, as being Provocations to
'Uncleanneſs. The Presbytery ſeriouſly
'conſidering all thoſe Things, and withal
'that the Holy Scriptures, the infallible
'Rule of Faith and Manners, do condemn
'all Impurity and Vice and every Thing
'that leads to it, that it commands us to
'abſtain from all Appearance of Evil, and
'to watch againſt all corrupt Communica-
'tions

'tions, fooliſh Jeſting and Talking, and to
'beware of partaking of others Mens Sins;
'*they do therefore*, in the Fear of the LORD
'warn, exhort and obteſt all within their
'Bounds, as they regard the Glory of GOD,
'the Honour and Intereſt of our Holy Reli-
'gion, and the Salvation of their own Souls,
'and of the Souls of ſuch as are deareſt to
'them, that they ſeriouſly lay to heart the
'Spirit and Genius of our holy Religion,
'and endeavour in their Stations to pro-
'mote, by their Influence and Example,
'the Faith and Practice of it; and for that
'End, to diſcourage theſe Stage-plays, to
'abſtain from attending them themſelves,
'and reſtrain ſuch as depend upon them,
'or are under their Influence, from doing
'ſo: And particularly recommend it to Mi-
'niſters and other Church-Officers to uſe
'all proper Methods with ſuch as may be
'under Prejudices from Curioſity or mi-
'ſtaken Notions of faſhionable Diverſion,
'to reclaim them from ſuch wrongous Im-
'preſſions and pernicious Inclinations, and
'to keep them from running themſelves in-
'to ſuch dangerous Snares. And do ear-
'neſtly beſeech Perſons of all Ranks and
'Conditions, that in an Age ſo corrupt and

'degenerate, they may, instead of Contri-
'buting any Thing to the growing Corrup-
'tion of it, distinguish themselves by clean-
'sing themselves from all Filthiness of the
'Flesh and Spirit, and by giving all Dili-
'gence to be found of our LORD in Peace,
'without Spot and blameless. And the
'Presbytery appoints this to be read from
'all the Pulpits within their Bounds, on
'Sabbath next, immediately after Sermon
'in the Forenoon. *Extracted by* NICOL SPENCE *Clerk.*

I believe no Body but the *Independent Whig* himself would look upon this Admonition to be any more than what the Duty of Ministers required at their Hands. If they have meddled with Mens Diversions it is only by Way of Exhortation. There's no judicious Christian but looks upon the present *English* Stage to be a Seminary of Vice, and that Gentleman might have found many more proper Occasions of libelling all the Clergy of the Christian World, than this Admonition of the *Presbytery* of *Edinburgh* to the People under their Ministry to abstain from Stage-plays.

SIR,

Sir, If I have ſaid ſomething more than was juſt neceſſary to vindicate my *Poſitions* concerning the Lawfulneſs of Stage-plays from your *Remarks*, I have done it for your Sake, and the Sake of others, more than for my own. The Diverſion of the Stage I look upon as ſinful and unchriſtian; and though perhaps I have reaſoned againſt it with little Succeſs, yet I have the Satisfaction of having done my Duty, and of being more and more confirmed in my Opinion. My Task is harder than yours. I have the Heads and Hearts of People againſt me, and you have their Inclinations on your Side of the Queſtion. And all thoſe who are in Love with the ſublime Sport of the Theatre, will believe, that you have the better of the Argument, whether they underſtand it or not. Whatever Effect publick Debates may have upon others, they ſeldom or never change the Minds of the Diſputants. A certain Sort of Self-love begets in us an obſtinate Fondneſs of every Thing we can call *our own*. It is our Property, and we will not part with it. Nor would it be altogether ſo bad, if Men only retained their own Opinions. But, what is worſe, they frequently acquire a

mean

mean Opinion of one another. We have no Meaſure for another Man's Judgment, but our own, and he that differs from us, is of Neceſſity conſidered as our Inferior in that Particular. Many a Time have I been made Judge, firſt by one and then by the other Diſputant, if ever I heard ſuch *Nonſenſe*. And, ſince I am appriſed of this Weakneſs and Partiality of human Nature, I ſhall guard myſelf the more ſtrongly againſt all contemptible Thoughts of you. I believe the Subject is new to you, and that you have not taken Time ſufficient to think upon what you have written. On another Occaſion you may appear, in my Eyes, with more Advantage. And if you ſhould think fit to write again upon the ſame Subject, you muſt not expect to hear from me in haſte. Employment more agreeable, and more uſeful than writing Controverſy, probably will take up my Thoughts, for ſome Time. Mean Time let me aſſure you, that I ſhall, with Pleaſure, embrace every Occaſion to ſerve you. I heartily wiſh you all ſpiritual and temporal Proſperity, and earneſtly recommend you to GOD, who only can *make you wiſe unto Salvation*.

F I N I S.

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